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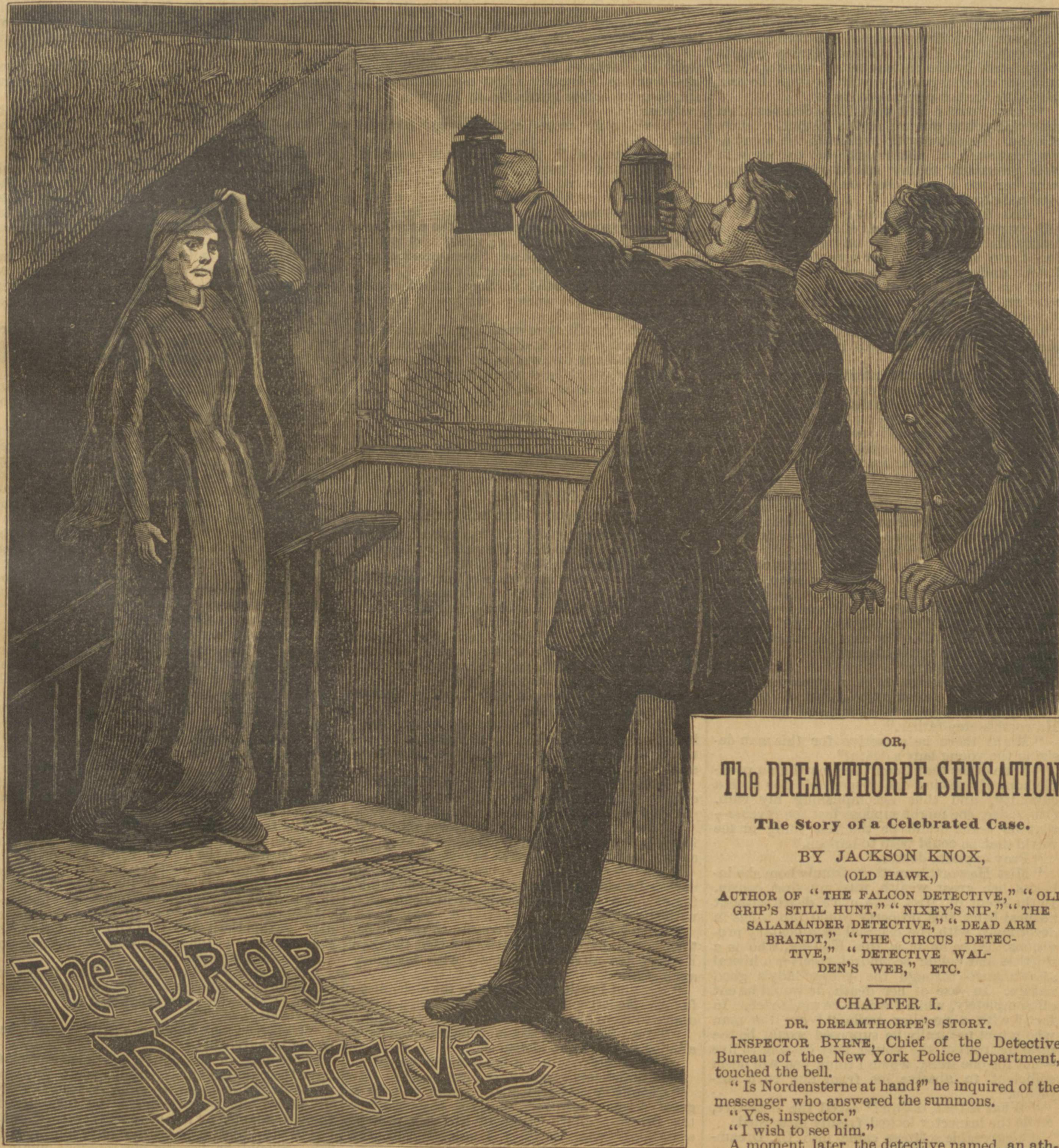
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OR, The DREAMTHORPE SENSATION.

The Story of a Celebrated Case.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "THE FALCON DETECTIVE," "OLD GRIP'S STILL HUNT," "NIXEY'S NIP," "THE SALAMANDER DETECTIVE," "DEAD ARM BRANDT," "THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE," "DETECTIVE WALDEN'S WEB," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DR. DREAMTHORPE'S STORY.

INSPECTOR BYRNE, Chief of the Detective Bureau of the New York Police Department, touched the bell.

"Is Nordensterne at hand?" he inquired of the messenger who answered the summons.

"Yes, inspector."

"I wish to see him."

A moment later the detective named, an athletic, resolute-looking and what might be termed a neutral-tinted young man of twenty-eight or

WHATEVER WAS THUS DISCLOSED, IT CAUSED THE DROP DETECTIVE TO MOMENTARILY RECOIL WITH AN APPALLED EXCLAMATION.

thirty, stood expectantly before the inspector's desk.

The inspector indicated by a nod a visitor to whom he had been granting an audience, and then addressed the latter, saying:

"Doctor Dreamthorpe, I make you acquainted with Mr. Karl Nordensterne, the detective who will look after your case. Tell him your story, with a few, but very few, additional particulars."

The visitor thus introduced looked interestedly at the detective, while the latter bowed gravely, with a side nod for his chief, as much as to say, "Ah, Dreamthorpe! Who doesn't know about Dreamthorpe?"

In fact, Dr. Dreamthorpe—Dr. Paracelsus Dreamthorpe, to give his name, real or assumed, in full, was a somewhat remarkable-looking man.

Tall, lean, fair-haired, scrupulously attired in sober black, his refined, handsome face, with its abstracted expression and clear but brooding eyes, might have belonged to a man yet in the prime of life, and still suggested something of the prodigious and mysterious past that we look for in a mummy or a painting of ancient but doubtful date. An inventor, or a scholar, one would hazard at first glance, as to his profession; perhaps a chemist, or a student of the occult sciences, at a closer examination; and his conjecture would be nearer the mark.

"I have but one patient in my Sanitarium at present," the doctor at once proceeded to say, for the detective's enlightenment. "This is a young lady, Miss Salome Haworth. I am treating her for an ailment which had baffled not only the curative efforts, but the analysis, of such physicians as she had consulted before coming to me, but which I am confident of being able to eradicate, if not interfered with in the course of my treatment. This confidence, I may add, is fully shared by the patient herself, which, under ordinary circumstances, would in itself be half the battle for her permanent cure.

"I may further add that Miss Haworth is a very rich young woman, and a distant relative of mine. Together with her maid, she occupies my best suite of apartments, and the sear in close proximity to my laboratory, that I may have her the more closely under my constant personal supervision.

"Miss Haworth's ailment is peculiar. She is suffering from the cruel and clinging effects of a deadly and mysterious poison that was introduced into her system over a twelvemonth ago. I alone understand the nature of that poison, allow me to say, and I alone have the power to counteract its insidious effect. My treatment, it is scarcely needful to say, depends upon extraordinary watchfulness and care, no less than the intelligent ministering of my medicine with my own hands.

"I am being secretly interfered with, to the constant menace of my patient's life. That is why I am here. I want a detective to discover who this secret enemy is. Miss Haworth is aware of her danger, and she is generous. The detective who shall succeed in averting this danger, by the detection and arrest of the criminal, will be richly rewarded. Such are the outlines of the case."

At a sign from his chief, Nordensterne, who had listened with profound interest, said:

"Your own suspicions have not been fastened upon any one, I suppose, doctor?"

"No," replied Dreamthorpe, knitting his brows, "I cannot say that they have, for a surety. And yet there is a certain man whom I might deem capable of this villainous tampering, were it not for the fact that he is forbidden my house, and cannot, so far as I know, have any communication with its inmates."

"Who is this man?"

"He also pretends to be a physician, I believe," with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "His name is Joseph Koffsky, and he is Miss Haworth's step-father."

"Might there be a motive for this man desiring the young lady's death?"

"None other that I can imagine than a possible hope of making me responsible for such a calamity, and thus accomplishing my ruin. Otherwise, one might suppose just the reverse—that her death would be the last thing in the world that he could wish to happen."

"Pray explain, doctor."

Miss Haworth's mother, from whom she inherits her great wealth, was my first cousin. In the event of Miss Haworth's death without natural heirs, this property would fall to me in accordance with the original testamentary provisions. Now, as it is, this Koffsky, who is a shiftless and vulgar scoundrel, receives a liberal allowance through the young lady's good nature. In case of her death, he would be cut off completely, while I would be made rich. In fact," with a peculiar smile, "I am the man who might naturally be supposed would be the most desirous of the young lady ceasing to live—but for one thing, which I think you will deem sufficient to absolve me from any such suspicion."

"What is that, doctor?" asked the detective, while the inspector looked freshly interested.

An agreeable softness came into Dr. Dreamthorpe's face.

"Miss Haworth is my betrothed," he answered, gently. "We shall be married on my effecting her cure—otherwise not, I have long since determined."

There was a quiet suggestion of unselfishness and self-devotedness in both the tone and manner of saying this that said much for the speaker's manliness and simplicity.

"You say, doctor," observed Nordensterne, with a slightly dismissive gesture for this side issue in the case, "that Miss Haworth is your only patient?"

"That is all. My Sanitarium is a large and somewhat rambling building, in which I have at times furnished accommodations for numerous patients. I see by your nod that you know the building. It would be strange if you did not, as it is one of the oldest landmarks at Washington Heights, where it has been in my family for generations—the old manor-house, in fact. But for a number of months past I have devoted myself exclusively to this young lady's case."

"Of what other inmates does your establishment consist, doctor?"

"Miss Haworth has her own maid, Greeta Muller, a likely young German or Hungarian woman, in whom she has the fullest confidence. Then I have my cook, Alphonse Tourette, and his wife Celeste, who is my housekeeper. She has her niece, Maida Berlioz, as an assistant. These are worthy Swiss folk who have been with me long, and whose fidelity I regard as beyond suspicion. Then I have Johann, my German coachman, now with my coupe at the entrance to this building, and Hannibal, my negro footman and body-servant. These, also, have long enjoyed my fullest confidence. That is all."

"You would not think of suspecting either one of these domestics, then?"

"Not directly, most assuredly," the doctor seemed to hesitate. "Though I wouldn't be so sure that one or another might not, unknown to me, be more or less influenced by fear."

"Fear?"

"Yes," still more slowly—"superstitious fear."

"Ah! ghosts, eh?" And the detective smiled.

"Ridiculous, of course!" replied Dr. Dreamthorpe, with a shrug of the shoulders, not wholly in accordance with a certain fluttering anxiety in his answering smile. "But I do not deny that my servants are suspicious—the negro and Madame Tourette especially; while both wings of the old house have long been unoccupied. You can draw your own conclusions."

"Might the deserted portions afford secure hiding for a clever enemy desirous of playing mischievous tricks?"

"Possibly," still more uneasily. "But that is what I want you to find out. I have been unable to make any discoveries on my own part."

The detective glanced inquiringly at his chief, and received a single nod.

"I will call and make a preliminary investigation this evening, doctor," he said.

The visitor seemed satisfied, said he would be glad to receive him at the Sanitarium, and abruptly took his departure.

CHAPTER II.

NORDENSTERNE AND HIS CHIEF.

The detective stepped to a window whence he could obtain a view of Dr. Dreamthorpe getting into the coupe in waiting for him.

"The alchemist and man of mystery!" he said, as if thinking aloud. "Yes, and the same solid, wooden-faced Dutchman who has been his coachman for many a year!"

"Come back here, Nordensterne," the inspector ordered. "Wasn't it this man's wife who was burned to death in a Pennsylvania railroad accident a year or more ago?"

"Yes," replied the detective, seating himself at his chief's right hand.

"She had deserted him some time previous, it was said, and her identity as Therese Dreamthorpe—a grandly handsome woman—made some noise in the newspapers at the time."

"And now he is betrothed to this young cousin of his, whom he seems so anxious about?"

"So it seems by his own admission."

"I wonder how she could have been subjected to the poison that he is now engaged in counteracting, according to what he says?"

Nordensterne shook his head, and they exchanged a glance that showed each to be thinking of much the same possibility in connection with the case.

"Doctor Dreamthorpe," continued the inspector, "could hardly have suspected that the man Koffsky has already been here with his story against him."

"No; and I rather think that in the alchemist's favor. He struck me as being sincere in his desire to have his apprehensions investigated."

"True. This is the second time that you have alluded to him as an alchemist."

"That is his reputation in a popular way."

"But, alchemy is no longer practiced."

"Chemistry, its legitimate outgrowth, is a great science, however. Besides, have we not the Brown-Sequard elixir of life as a present sensation?" with a short laugh. "And the search for that, no less than for the philosopher's

stone and the universal panacea, was one of the prime secrets of the occult science."

"This man is reputed a great chemist, then?"

"More than that, inspector. He is the author of a recent contribution to a scientific medical periodical in which he claims to have antedated the vaunted Brown-Sequard discovery by over two hundred years, or rather to have superseded it by that length of time with a far more valuable discovery—the true and only elixir of life, as he asserts—and to be himself a living illustration of its efficacy."

"A living illustration?"

"Yes. For instance, the old mansion up yonder on the Hudson that he occupies as a Sanitarium, is said to have really been in the Dreamthorpe family, in its original form, from the early colonial days—indeed, to have descended from father to son through numerous generations."

"But, what of that?"

"It is also said that not one of the possessors has ever been known to die. All have severally disappeared abroad, whence the next descendant has periodically appeared to claim the estate, with the requisite proofs of the death of the last owner in some far distant country, and of his own identity as the next and only lineal descendant and heir."

"Well?"

"Well, it is either claimed by the present incumbent, or for him, I don't know which, that there has been really no death whatever in the paternal line for over two hundred years—that he is, in his own person, the *original* Dreamthorpe, thus reborn, or reappearing, through the successive generations under different given names, as a sop to the Cerberus of public curiosity, and through the agency of this life-renewing, decay-defying elixir which remains his unique secret."

The inspector made a contemptuous movement, and turned to the consideration of some memoranda laid out before him.

"Humph! Something in the Theosophic Blavatsky line," he muttered. "If I had known the fellow as such a charlatan, he would have hardly got such a respectful hearing."

"I don't believe it would have made much difference with you, inspector," observed the detective, thoughtfully, "if he had seen fit to talk on miscellaneous subjects. They do say he is something of a marvel in the conversational line."

"Yes, yes; so is George Francis Train, for that matter, if one were disposed to be talked to death at his leisure. However, the matter is in your hands, Karl, and you can give me your report to-night."

Here he looked up suddenly, as there were hurried, somewhat scuffling steps approaching, as of some one being more or less restrained in an over impetuosity to enter the room.

"It is that crank, Koffsky, again—I recognize his step," said the inspector. "This may be opportune. Remain where you are, Karl."

At this juncture the main door was thrown violently open, and a short, fat, middle-aged man of foreign and excited aspect, burst into the office, in spite of a policeman striving to moderate his transports by a clutch on his coat-collar, while a doorman also followed, looking both apologetic and disturbed.

"Here, inspector!" puffed and spluttered the new-comer, fairly dancing a hornpipe of indignation, and vainly endeavoring to twist and squirm himself free; "behold this outrage! And for what? Because I demand an interview with yourself. Is this a free country, or a military despotism, or a police-ridden oligarchy? Am I in America, or Russia, or Prussia, or China?"

Here his immediate captor, a huge Irishman, with a good-natured grin on his broad face, shook him into temporary speechlessness, while saying in explanation:

"Sure, Misther Inspector, he wudn't have been restrained at all at all if he hadn't made a bellowin' an' inconsiderate rush for your Honor's doore like a haythen bull at a red shirt! Be quiet, you devil!" to his prisoner, with a fresh shake; "d'y'e think you're in a bear-garden, or a rat-pit, whin it's before Inspector Byrne himself you are, you omadhoun?"

"It's true, sir," corroborated the doorman, in a grieved tone. "He was even more crankish than when here the last time, Mr. Inspector."

"Owl!" sputtered the fat man, red in the face, and ready to jump out of his skin. "Justice, that is what I demand, Mr. Inspector—justice—vindication. Yow! Am I to have a hearing, or not? Is this the court of Peter the Great, the Star Chamber of the Inquisition, or the one-horse ante-room of a police—"

"Hold your fool-jaw!" growled the inspector, in unmitigated disgust, "or you may get a sweater! Do you know what that is?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"Well, you may find out a little sooner than would be agreeable."

Something in the chief's sternness seemed to have the required effect; at all events the irrepressible visitor began to calm down instantly.

"Leave him here," ordered the inspector, to the attendants. "I'll hear what Mr. Koffsky has to say—that is, if he has anything new to say. Should he become obstreperous again, I

will call you back, or Nordensterne will chuck him out of the window!"

Then, when the doorman and patrolman had gone, Koffsky, for he it was, adopted the whining and wailing style which is so often one of the features of intense excitement among Hungarians, Bohemians and other foreigners.

"Sir," he exclaimed, wringing his fat hands piteously, "in what miserable plight I am! That villain, Dreamthorpe, still keeps my poor Salome under his evil power, and is doing her to death with slow poison, unrestrained! Jehovah of the nations! Will you not hear me? Sir, my poor daughter, she is a wronged, a murdered child! That Dreamthorpe, vile necromancer, base sorcerer, that he is! What, will you not hang him for me? He should be dragged asunder by wild horses—he should be burnt at the stake—crucified! Ow!"

"Be careful, I tell you, or out you go!" interposed the inspector, sternly. "Is this all you have to say—the same unsupported story?"

"But, my fate! is it not enough, Mr. Inspector? Is it—"

"No; it is simply nothing. Stop your jabbering, and listen to me. Is the young lady your daughter?"

"Not exactly, sir; but—"

"Enough! Have you any legal guardianship over her?"

"No, sir, perhaps not; but then, if the law does not give me the right, there are moral considerations—"

"Moral fiddlesticks! You are simply the young lady's step-father, or were such when her mother was living? Isn't that about the size of it?"

"Very true, sir; but—"

"No more! She is of legal age and her own mistress?"

"Yes," sullenly.

"And makes you a money-allowance out of pure good nature, I understand?"

"A paltry hundred dollars a month!" he began to fume afresh. "That, sir, when she is worth a million! Ah, but I see! That villain, Dreamthorpe—the necromancer, the poison-decocter!—he has been here before me! Don't deny it! I read the guilty secret in your eyes, Mr. Inspector! Ay," pointing furiously, "and in those of your satrap yonder, too! Ow! But imagine not, ye throned despots—"

"Silence!" roared the chief, though more than half-disposed to laugh at the fellow's vaporings.

"Are you going to behave yourself, or not?"

Dr. Koffsky caught his breath, shrugged his shoulders, ducked his oily head, and made a sort of submissive salaam.

"Do you know anything against this Doctor Dreamthorpe, of your own knowledge?" was the next sternly-demanded question.

"No, sir, not exactly. But, do I not tell you, or have I not heretofore told you, that by her death he will become rich—the possessor of my poor Salome's property—while I—"

The poor man smote his forehead, and could say no more, winding up with a few tears.

"That will do, Koffsky. Don't come here again."

"What!" raved the visitor, wildly; "am I not to have justice? My poor Salome! She is already suffering from poison which that villain pretends to be eradicating. Ow! Justice is dead in America! Siberia is a heaven in comparison—so is Pekin—so is Dahomey!"

A sudden thought occurred to the inspector.

"Who administered the poison to the young lady in the first instance?" he suddenly demanded.

"How should I know? Perhaps Dreamthorpe himself, or, more than likely, that devil of a wife of his, the grand Therese! Ha, ha, ha!" hysterically. "Talk of her being dead! Preposterous! A trick, a cheat! Fire doesn't kindle that would burn, nor water flow that would drown the witch! Ow!"

He was rapidly growing incoherent again, so the inspector signed to Nordensterne, who summarily hustled the over-excitable step-father of Salome out of the apartment.

"You can take all this for what it is worth," observed the inspector, when the detective returned. "You can report to me this evening. Send a messenger to me on your way out."

CHAPTER III.

THE SANITARIUM.

As it was quite late in the afternoon of a windy and raw March day when the obstreperous Dr. Koffsky had thus been disposed of, it was more than early nightfall when Nordensterne, the "Drop" or "Flash-fingered Detective," as he had become known among his associates and others from the lightning-like promptitude with which he had flashed out his revolver and got the "drop" on his man in more than one hard pinch of extreme peril, reached Harlem on his way to keeping his appointment with Dr. Dreamthorpe at the latter's Riverside Sanitarium.

He would rather have made his preliminary investigation by broad daylight, inasmuch as he was but imperfectly familiar with the premises, which were, moreover, of a long-established and somewhat uncanny reputation among the older inhabitants of the rapidly filling-up suburb

though still presenting many a secluded and unoccupied spot.

But at the same time the spice of adventure was not without its charm for the detective, who had not been on a really exciting chase for many a day, and in fact, was beginning to feel a little stale when summoned by good luck to meet the eccentric professor of the occult sciences, but a few hours previous.

Good luck? But, that remained to be proved, though the Drop Detective was determined to find out in very short order that the inertia of which he had complained was to have no place in the investigation now entered upon.

Quitting the cable-road at the northernmost point to which it was completed at the time of writing, which was in the neighborhood of Tenth avenue and 180th street, Nordensterne proceeded due west along the latter thoroughfare.

It was little more than a rude country road, lying through open fields or rough building lots, and poorly lighted by flickering street lamps at wide intervals.

Had both sides been thickly set with brightly-beaming shop windows, as in the busy downtown thoroughfares, the lamps would doubtless have been felicitously multiplied, with perhaps an electric arc-light thrown in by way of assistance in dissipating the cimmerian gloom. But, being as the causeway was dreary and deserted, with an uncomfortable suggestion of foot-pads or child-stealers, as a matter of course the public lamps were relatively the fewer and further between, in accordance with the municipal wisdom of the American metropolis, for such as are sufficiently imaginative or optimistic as to perceive it.

However, on reaching and turning up the broader Eleventh avenue, with its boulevard characteristics, the prospect gradually improved.

There were fairly well-kept grounds at either side, and our investigator presently came before a lamp, suspended in a rusty iron arch over a dilapidated driveway gate, which bore the single word "SANITARIUM" in red letters.

The grounds were extensive and gloomy by reason of being interspersed with clumps of trees, mostly evergreens.

Far back along the driveway, which was tree-girt after the manner of an old-time avenue and was the only entering walk, there was a glimmer of numerous lights, which evidently meant the front of the Sanitarium building, deep in the grounds at a distance, it would seem, of fully two hundred yards from the road.

As there was no gate to open the detective entered without a moment's hesitation, and proceeded at his accustomed brisk walk up the way.

He never thought of immediate danger, and carried twirlingly in his hand an apparently light, inoffensive walking-stick, which could, nevertheless, be suddenly shut up or shortened upon itself, telescope-fashion, into a loaded billy or night-stick of convenient grasp and weight that had frequently seen hard and at times desperate service.

He was, moreover, not without other and somewhat novel means of defense, in case of emergency.

That emergency, though wholly unsuspected (it is the unsuspected, no less than the unexpected, that always happens, by the way,) was already upon him.

At a particularly gloomy point of the avenue, somewhat more than midway to the house, he was suddenly beset by several ruffians, armed with cudgels, and found himself the center of a combined attack that with one less alert, active and athletic might speedily have produced for him a terrific, if not fatal, beating.

But, instantly on his guard, the detective's shortened cane was at once playing out in every direction in a prodigy of single-stick practice that served to protect him from harm while sizing up the extent of the danger for what it was worth.

His situation was sufficiently precarious.

In perfect silence, and like so many shadows, his assailants had swarmed out upon him from every side, and for an instant nothing was heard but the sound of stick upon stick and the deep, short breathings of desperate and determined men.

"Kill him!" then exclaimed a soft, melodious woman's voice, seemingly in a foreign accent, from somewhere in the gloom. "He is a detective, who may ruin my plot. Kill him, kill him! Why don't you kill him?"

Then the beset detective caught, or thought he caught, the shadowy outline of a majestic and graceful figure flitting menacingly from point to point on the outer hem of the ruffianly clubbers who were encircling him.

Doubly mysterious! More must be seen, even at the risk of rendering himself a better target for his assailants.

In an instant Nordensterne's bosom suddenly blazed out with an immense illumination from what appeared as an incandescent star of white light just under his chin.

It was, in fact, an electric breast-pin that he wore, and whose connecting circuit he had

turned on by managing to touch a concealed dynamo button with a flashing movement of his momentarily disengaged left hand.

There was revealed the figures and masked faces of his assailants, who were seen to shrink back as if astounded, together with a black-clad female from behind them.

This latter almost instantly disappeared among the trees, however, with a bewildered exclamation.

Then, with a ringing battle-shout, Nordensterne, still blazing all over like a column of starry-white brilliancy, assumed the offensive, dashing right and left, this way and that, with such a tremendous cudgel display as speedily left him master of the field.

"Come off!" cried the same soft, foreign voice from somewhere among the trees. "The man is a devil—I must devise other means. Come off!"

They did not effect their evanishment, however, without receiving many a hard and bruising rap, after which the peril was at an end.

Then there was an answering shout from the direction of the house, and lanterns were seen hurrying down the driveway.

The detective's unnatural brilliancy of person suddenly vanished, and when Dr. Dreamthorpe, attended by his lantern-bearers, came rushing upon the scene, he was as an ordinary being.

The professor seemed greatly disturbed on recognizing his visitor, and being informed of what had chanced.

"Bad, bad, bad!" he repeated, nervously. "You should have come in a carriage and driven straight up to the house, in which case they would doubtless have not dared to molest you. But come now with me, Mr. Nordensterne. This is frightful, frightful!"

But the Drop Detective paused a moment, studying him keenly.

One of the lantern-bearers was the doctor's German coachman, who made no comment whatever but stood staring blankly, lantern in hand, like a man of wood.

But the other, a gigantic negro, in somewhat gorgeous livery, and with a decidedly comical cast of face and expression, was gazing at the visitor with wide-rolling eyes and gaping mouth.

"Gor' a massy!" he stammered. "War it de woman in brack dat you done see'd, sah? Dat am de ghos' ob de ole house! An' war dat de gal dat lighted up all of a sudden wif a gahment ob ghos'-fire, marse?"

"No, no, my man!" cried Nordensterne, laughing. "That was myself. Observe now how I manage to do my own electric lighting on occasion."

He accordingly once more caused his electric breastpin to sparkle forth, much to the negro's consternation, and then accompanied the doctor as he had been requested.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. DREAMTHORPE'S PATIENT.

THE proprietor of the Sanitarium seemed so unaffectedly distressed and agitated over what had occurred, and was so painfully profuse in his apologies, that Nordensterne, on the way up to the house, abstained from commenting on the affair as severely as he might otherwise and justly have done.

"All I can say is, doctor," he at last said, half-jocosely, "that if your house grounds are infested as a rule with the sort of vermin that attacked me, it would be no more than fair for you to put up signs, broad by day and illuminated by night, to that effect. Instead of the proverbial, 'Keep off the Grass,' or, 'No Trespassing Allowed,' you might use such placards as, 'Look out for Assassins,' 'Beware of the Murderous Specter in Black,' or something of similar import, to no little advantage."

"Ah, sir, don't mention it, I beg of you!" replied the doctor, in increased distress. "I am humiliated—mortified beyond measure! Sir, this shall be looked to. An outrage, a scandal! And if these vandals, these scoundrels, make their lair in one of the disused wings, or among the vaults, you must assist me in bringing them to justice."

"With pleasure," observed the detective. "In fact, you can depend on me, my dear sir. But the woman in black—the mysterious female?"

The doctor did not make any direct reply. He couldn't understand this feature of the incident, he said. Might not the detective have been misled by his imagination? No. And ah, yes; he had even heard her voice—in fact, the *only* voice. Well, well, it certainly was all very mysterious, and not less annoying and exasperating. However, he, the doctor, was used to dealing solely with scientific facts, and could take no account of mysteries. Mysteries? What were they but masked facts, unapparent truths, and therefore, as mysterious, non-existent, but simply unknowables? Yes, all should ultimately be made plain with patient research and intelligent analysis. He was sure of it. And so he went on with his generalizations, which the detective felt to be nothing more than a mere beating about the bush, meant to evade a puzzling and disagreeable subject.

He made no answer, and they were presently face to face with the Sanitarium building.

A large, rambling and ancient-looking manor house, as the doctor himself had once characterized it.

There was a double, three-story main building with a high, broad portico, which, being fairly lighted up, was evidently in daily use, and also gave indications of comparatively recent restoration in the way of a bright coat of yellow paint, with darker trimming, and other repairs.

But, there was a low, long, squatly-looking two-story wing on either side, whose numerous windows were closely-shuttered up, and of a generally cheerless, somber and abandoned aspect that seemed to incongruously ante-date the brighter central pile by many years.

The proprietor had paused at the foot of the piazza steps, after dismissing his attendants, as if to give his guest an opportunity to observe and comment upon the exterior of the contradictory old house as well as the gloom of the evening would admit.

"It's an odd-looking place, doctor," was the detective's first and rather commonplace response to this implied expectation.

"What do you think of it?" asked Dreamthorpe, abruptly. "How does it impress you?"

"Humph! I am in the habit of speaking my mind candidly, doctor."

"I shall like you the better for that, Mr. Nordensterne."

"Looks to me like an old beggar woman who has put on a tawdry yellow bodice, and let her ancient rags go tatter-fly alow and aloft—or on either side in the manner of blow-out skirts, in this case. Now if it were my Sanitarium, you know—if you can imagine such a thing as a detective running a private hospital, you know?"

"Yes, yes," impatiently. "Well, what then, Mr. Nordensterne?"

"Well, I'd sort of brush up the wings a bit for the sake of consistency, and give 'em the air of being occupied by something more human than owls or rats, whether they are so or not."

"Humph! and I would not. Perhaps it's more expensive than you imagine to run an entire Sanitarium in the interest of a single patient, even when a rich and agreeable one. Come in, Mr. Nordensterne, come in!"

He led the way up the steps and through a broad main entrance that the gorgeous negro, whom his master had more than once addressed as Hannibal, was obsequiously holding open for them.

Here, in a spacious but low-ceiled hall, quaintly appointed, and lighted by an immense Chinese drop-lamp of castellated design in many-colored glass, Dr. Dreamthorpe surveyed his visitor with some solicitude while the latter was disposing of his hat and overcoat.

"You're sure you are not bruised, sir, nor otherwise injured?" he asked.

"What, from those masked dastards back yonder?" was the unaffectedly indifferent response. "Bless you, no, doctor! They were mere pastime for me, and knew no more of single-stick than a cat does of shelling walnuts."

"You'll do! Come with me, if you please."

The professor forthwith led the way to his laboratory.

It was up one flight of stairs, back, and comprised a large room, surrounded by shelves, that were packed with dusty old books, manuscripts, pamphlets, and vials, the latter being the most numerous, and with a chemist's furnace and other appliances at the rear.

It was agreeably lighted by a large alabaster-globed drop-lamp, that imparted a singularly soft, pearly effulgence.

A large, solid-looking ebony table, partly littered with vials, books, stationery and writing materials, occupied the center of the floor, which was bare, but of hard, polished oak, directly under the lamp.

There were none of the stock-features that are usually associated with a den of the sort, such as skulls for paper-weights, skeletons on wires, snakes, lizards, monstrosities in jars, and the like.

On the contrary, the place had a rather cozy, comfortable aspect.

The end at which they had entered even had the floor covered with a rich Smyrna rug. On each side there was a drawn *portiere* of dark, expensive, heavily-falling drapery, evidently leading off to suites of rooms at either hand; and in orderly disposition along the walls thereabouts there were arm and ordinary chairs, all high-backed and antique-fashioned, but still substantially upholstered in morocco dark with age—a slumber-inviting divan of oriental sumptuousness, ottomans and footstools.

"Not for me!" observed the professor, in answered to an inquiring look from his visitor, after the latter's comprehensive glance had taken in his rather unexpected surroundings. "No; I am simply a scientific experimentist, whose motto is, Work hard and live hard. But you will understand presently. Take a seat."

Nordensterne obeyed.

The professor then looked to his furnace, saw that the fire was good, arranged an alembic for distillation, and took from his bosom a rather large vial containing a bright greenish liquid, which he smelled critically, and then restopped, evidently with no little self-content.

"Observe!" he said, holding the vial up to the light. "This precious fluid was prepared by me from many secret ingredients early this morning, and has not since then passed out of my intimate personal possession. I shall now, or in a few moments, distill from the compound the rare essence which constitutes my patient's single daily dose. It will be administered here, on the spot, the instant that its distillation is perfected. This is my sole treatment. With such care observed in both the preparation and the administering of the dose every day, you would hardly deem it possible that it could be maliciously tampered with in one way or another, would you?"

The detective shook his head.

"Well, neither would I," Dr. Dreamthorpe knitted his brows, "were I not convinced to the contrary. But, more of this presently."

He touched a little call-bell on the table, and, still holding the vial jealously in his left hand, stepped to the richer of the *portieres*, which he drew aside, to the revelation of a softly-lighted, sumptuously carpeted corridor.

"Salome!" he called, in a voice that instinctively sunk to a caressing sweetness of moderation. "Salome!" And, as a rustling sound was heard in response, accompanied by a word or two inarticulately murmured in a velvety voice, he stood back with a sort of obeisance and a rapt, adoring look.

Then the mysterious single patient of the Riverside Sanitarium, Salome Haworth, entered so floatingly and ethereally that she might be thought to have gradually materialized in obedience to the magically uttered, "Arise!" or "Appear!" of a necromancer's invocation, rather than to have come into view in the ordinary way.

Her maid, a handsome, Gypsy-looking girl, with midnight eyes and splendid teeth that flashed through the half-parting of her full ripe lips, followed in attendance, much as a Charmian, an Iras, or other Oriental maid, in the wake of a Cleopatra emerging from the seclusion of her toilet cell.

But, further than that the *simile* were a profanation upon the pure and angelic beauty of the young woman thus gently disclosing her presence to Nordensterne's astounded gaze.

"Salome," said the physician, smiling contentedly; "this is the invalid, Mr. Nordensterne, I mentioned to you as proposing to place himself under my exclusive treatment, along with yourself. It will rest entirely with your."

He then abruptly went back to his furnace, and busied himself forthwith in the distillation of the liquid contained in the vial.

Miss Haworth accorded the detective a charming little courtesy, and, begging him to resume his seat, sunk into a reclining attitude on the divan.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERTED WINGS.

SPELLBOUND as he had been by the extreme beauty of the young lady, Nordensterne was placed almost at once at his ease by the unaffected artlessness and complacency with which she condescended to enter into conversation with him without any further preliminaries.

"Happy to know you, I am sure, Mr. Nordensterne!" she observed, with unexpected frankness and vivacity.—"Greeta, my dear," reclining back in the divan, and stretching out a transparently lovely little hand, glistening with costly rings, "my smelling-salts, if you please.—Yes," with an arch look at the detective while taking an airy little sniff at the salts, "and I do hope that we will get along amicably as fellow patients under Papa Dreamthorpe's treatment."

"But, as the good doctor observed, miss," replied the detective, who, however, had hardly thought of masquerading as an invalid until it was suggested, and quite unexpectedly, by the doctor himself, "my coming under his treatment at all will rest entirely with yourself."

"Ah!" with a toss of the pretty blonde head and a deprecating shrug of the delicately-shaped shoulders; "but Papa Dreamthorpe is altogether too deferential. What am I that I should presume to monopolize his occult and extraordinary talents?" And then abruptly: "What a pretty name you have, Mr. Nordensterne!"

"I really believe I have, m'am; though it never occurred to me before, you pronounce it so musically."

"Thanks! but, without intending any compliment, I like nearly all the Norse names. There is the name of that explorer, Norden-skold, which ought to mean northern-shield, I suppose. It has always pleased my imagination. Yours ought to signify northern-star, no?"

"Doubtless." He would have had it mean anything to likewise please her imagination.

"And you are an invalid, Mr. Nordensterne?"

"Well—er—Doctor Dreamthorpe seems to think so."

The physician, having completed his distillation, now came forward, with its result, some sparkling amber-hued liquid in a wine-glass, carefully carried in his hand.

"Mr. Nordensterne is suffering from nervous

prostration," he said, with complacent mendacity, "but will speedily be himself again after a brief sojourn here. Now, Salome, your potion is ready for you. You need not make a wry face in advance, for it is just as sweet and palatable as you have hitherto found it."

She persisted, however, in making a little *moue*, or wry mouth, while leisurely sipping the compound, Greeta meanwhile looking on with her brilliant though strange smile that had already caused the detective to study her more critically than she was perhaps aware of.

Then Miss Haworth retired, almost immediately after disposing of the draught, followed obsequiously by her maid, the *portiere* once more fell together over the corridor entrance, and Dreamthorpe and his visitor were again alone.

"What put it into your head," demanded the latter, "to have me come here as a patient?"

"There is no other way by which you could pursue your investigation thoroughly," was the composed reply. "You don't object, I hope?"

"No," after a pause.

"Good! you can then make yourself acquainted with my establishment at your leisure, and without flurrying any one. Suppose you come as an invalid to-morrow?"

"Agreed."

"Would you like to take a first look through the unoccupied portions of the building now, or later on?"

"No time like the present."

Apparently much pleased with this reply, Dreamthorpe requested the young man to accompany him, and led the way out of the laboratory into the main passage by which they had entered it, where Hannibal was found seated as if on guard.

"The lanterns, Hannibal!" commanded the physician. "Mr. Nordensterne is to take up his quarters here to-morrow, and will in the mean time look through the deserted wings."

The negro had started up, round-eyed, and with a frightened look.

"Lor'! Marse Dreamt'rōpe," he stammered, "I—I won't hab to go 'long, will I?"

"No, you fool!" impatiently. "The lanterns, I tell you."

On these at last being furnished, the doctor gave one of them to the detective, reserving the other for himself, and led the way along a transverse corridor, with a locked door at the end which, on being opened, afforded direct ingress into the south or right wing.

The interior consisted of a dozen or more comfortably furnished sleeping apartments, occupying the two floors, and opening severally upon a passage running the entire length of the wings.

All were successively explored, together with the clean, well-preserved cellar underneath, the latter communicating with the vault under the main building by an archway, which, however, was closely boarded up.

Nothing worthy of note was observed, the entire interior presented a commonplace air of sequestration and comfort lapsed into disuse, much as a similar section of a well-kept boarding-house might have done.

"This wing isn't much to investigate," observed the professor, on their way back to their starting point. "I merely showed it to you, as a matter of form. The north wing is the puzzler."

He entered it by another corridor entrance, directly across the main hall from the one made use of, and they were immediately in a large stately old bedchamber, where he lighted a gas-jet to the full revelation of the interior, which was both imposing and comfort-suggesting in its furniture and appointments, and yet with a ghostly air about it.

There were four windows, two on each side, all heavily curtained, a door opposite the one by which they had entered, and another alongside the former, midway between it and the back or west wall.

"The best single-room in the house!" announced the professor, a little sententiously. "In fact, it was—ahem!—coughing behind his hand—" my own and Mrs. Dreamthorpe's room when she was still living. A brisk coal fire in in the old-time grate there will brighten up things, and you'll doubtless come to like the apartment when—ahem!—you get used to it."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, with a slight feeling of consternation, he scarcely knew why; "is this to be my room?"

"Certainly; and the very best I can do for you." The detective felt that his face was being furtively studied. "Any objections to it?"

"None whatever, my dear sir. Let's go ahead."

Dreamthorpe gave a little grunt, apparently of satisfaction, and leaving the gas burning merrily, crossed to the opposite door, which he unlocked and opened.

Thence they proceeded down a short bare gallery to another door, which the professor also unlocked and opened, though not without some difficulty and betraying a certain degree of uneasiness.

"Be careful not to let the door slam shut after you," he said, in a low voice, leading the way into a large lumber-room of some sort. "There are strange draughts hereabouts, it is also

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troublesome to re-open from this side, there being no knob, and besides, a strangely unpleasant smell is sometimes apparent, which—the deuce!"

The warning had come too late, the door escaping from the detective's hand and flying shut with a clash, in a sudden gust that had swept into their faces, apparently from what appeared to be the head of a stairway in a remote corner.

At the same instant the detective instinctively backed up against the door with his hand up to his mouth and nostrils.

"Good God!" he managed to exclaim; "what a horrible smell!"

The professor had imitated his example, with an appalled look which he seemed endeavoring to master, but in vain.

"Yes, he muttered; "this is one of the mysteries of the accursed place. No one knows exactly what the smell is like."

"I do!" gasped the other. "It is the smell of blood—fresh human blood! Ha! what is that yonder?"

CHAPTER VI.

A PRELIMINARY MYSTERY.

NORDENSTERNE had uttered these startling words while holding his lantern—a luminous globular one, emitting much light, as was also that carried by the professor—high in the air with one hand, and pointing to the head of the stair with the other.

And this, to the release of his lips and nostrils, notwithstanding that the appalling smell, which he had likened not inaptly to that of fresh human blood, was intensifying almost beyond endurance.

"What is it you see?" demanded Dreamthorpe, with a sort of ghastly composure, his own eyes directed toward the spot indicated.

"There! don't you see it? Something black and shapeless rising slowly up out of that staircase! Ha! it is the figure of a woman!"

"A woman?" echoed Dreamthorpe, in a hollow voice. "Oh, but it cannot be!"

"What? Not only a woman, I tell you, but doubtless the same that urged on that ruffianly attack on me in the grounds! Wait!"

He was about rushing forward, even though the lantern now seemed to be growing vaporized and dim, when the professor clutched his arm.

"Pause!" exclaimed the latter, in a voice husky with fear. "It isn't twelve o'clock yet, is it?"

It was a sufficient proof of Nordensterne's magnificent nerve that he even looked at his watch, in response to this seemingly irrelevant question.

"No, nor anywhere near it!" he answered. "It isn't yet ten."

"Ah!" with a sort of relieved groan, "thank God for that!" And the clutch on his arm was loosened.

The detective then produced his revolver with his flash-fingered movement, and ran toward the black-shrouded figure at the stair-head, followed irresolutely by his companion.

At the instant, however, that the Drop Detective was about to touch the figure, it waved him back with a scornful movement, and raised its veil.

Whatever was thus disclosed, it caused him to momentarily recoil with an appalled exclamation.

Then, as if by magic, it had sunk from view, the hideous smell was all gone, and the lanterns emitted their wonted luster.

What species of dread visage had thus fleetingly been revealed to his startled eyes?

The visage of Death itself of an illuminated corpse-mask? of a human fiend? but ever and in any case with menacing and glowing eyes that seemed to burn through his soul?

He never knew, or could remember with any degree of precision, save that the sight had momentarily paralyzed him.

Now, however, with a shake of his athletic frame, he was once more his bold, fearless, adventurous self.

"Come!" he cried, and was already descending the steps, when his companion again seized his arm.

"What?" demanded the latter; "you will still follow on, after that?"

"Of course I will!" shaking off the grasp. "Should I be deterred by such cheap juggling as this? Come on!"

Dreamthorpe, who had somehow thoroughly regained his composure, now that the smell and dimness were no more, followed him down the steps without another word.

As they descended, there was a sound from somewhere far down below as of a heavy door being opened and closed, and that was all.

There was little more of interest to investigate.

The next or ground floor below was of the commonplace dormitory character, as had been observed in the south wing, and with no signs of any of the rooms or beds having been put to use, surreptitious or otherwise, in a long time.

Then they descended to the cellar.

This, as in the former instance, was likewise shut off from the cellar under the main building by the communicating arch being stoutly

boarded up, and was empty save for a collection of old boxes in one corner, in which there was heard a scrambling and squeaking of rats as the lanterns lighted up the place.

However, a tiny spot of flame, as of burning tallow or wax, was observable on the cement floor, just before a solid-looking, iron-studded door that was deeply set in the masonry of the west wall.

Nordensterne critically examined the spot until the flame had flickered out.

"It is wax, or spermaceti," he announced, rising and examining the door. "It had doubtless guttered down from a lantern, perhaps left on this spot while our bugaboo was masquerading for our paralyzation at the top of the stair." He tried the door, but it remained as immovable as the masonry itself; there being no knob, or latch, and the keyhole of the great rusty lock giving no indications of having been used in a long time. "Look you, professor. That woman made her entrance and escape by this door somehow."

"Humph! woman?"

Dreamthorpe was looking at him incredulously.

"Yes, sir!" continued the detective, confidently. "It was a real woman, and no ghost, I am satisfied of it—and the same woman who flitted among my ruffianly assailants out in your grounds this evening—and they, at all events, were prosaic flesh and blood enough, chumps as they proved themselves at single-stick fighting. Flesh and blood, I tell you, and she, too, notwithstanding the horrifying face she was enabled to present to us!"

"How about that frightful smell?"

Nordensterne, who had put up his pistol, scratched his head, and looked about him searchingly.

"Yonder is the river front, eh?" he queried, pointing to the wall.

The chemist nodded.

"And whither does that door lead—into a tunnel-passage?"

"I don't know."

Nordensterne elevated his brows.

"And yet this is your ancestral home, my friend?"

"That notwithstanding," somewhat doggedly, "I am ignorant as to the intention of that door. I—I may have remarked it years ago, perhaps when a mere boy, if I ever was a boy in my recollection," slowly and doubtfully, "but, if so, it was without knowing or caring as to its object."

"Ah! Allow me to ask, professor, which part of this old building is the oldest—the original or parent building, you know?"

"This part, this wing, in which we are now standing," Dreamthorpe spoke yet more reflectively, his eyes slightly lowered, and rubbing his foot over the cemented floor, "though of course it has been restored from time to time over and over again."

"How old is it?"

"Oh, how should I know?" with some impatience. "Perhaps even older than I am—but how ridiculous!" in sudden confusion. "Over two hundred years, at the least."

"Doctor," asked the detective, abruptly, "how long, let me ask, has this particular wing of your Sanitarium been thus hermetically sealed, as it were?"

Dreamthorpe slightly started, and then seemed to be on the alert.

"Ever since," he slowly replied, "my wife's disappearance—fourteen months ago."

"Her disappearance?"

"Yes; you have doubtless heard," a little unsteadily, "of the tragic nature of Mrs. Dreamthorpe's death?"

The detective nodded gravely.

"Well, she had deserted me two months previous to that—had disappeared, as you might say."

"Ah! You will pardon my questioning you rather closely, doctor?"

"Certainly; ask what you please."

"Was this wing closed up and abandoned before or after your wife's disappearance?"

"Afterward—directly afterward."

"Nothing singular, or supernatural was ever associated with it before?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Since then, have you explored, or attempted to explore, the locality before now, in my company?"

The doctor grew agitated, and looked around him half-fearfully on the bare moldering walls of masonry.

"Once, once only!" he replied, in a low, hurried voice. "Hannibal and Johann were with me. It nearly killed them, the negro particularly. Don't allude to it again—never again!" with increased disquiet. "But take this advice from me—never try another examination on your own account at or near midnight!"

"What! was your experience then even worse than ours up yonder?"

"Infinitely, infinitely! Don't allude to it again—ever again, I beg of you! Come, let us retrace our steps."

He suited the action to the word, leading the way up the steps and through the eerie second-

story loft, as it might be called, with no little precipitation.

It was only when they were again in the large, stately old bedchamber, under the cheering gaslight that had been left burning, and with the communicating door locked and bolted behind them, that he seemed to breathe with full freedom.

"That is the door that blew shut so oddly," observed the detective, turning to examine it.

Dreamthorpe nodded, and then, divining what was passing in the other's mind, he said:

"Yes; and, in view of my warning words at the time, you can't account for my having just opened it so easily?"

"That is it."

"Still, my warning was not out of place at the time. Until that infernal vision, and its associative blood-smell, had vanished, we could not have reopened the door from the thither side, even had we retained the intelligence and energy to make the attempt—no, not even with axes and crowbars to assist us, I firmly believe. *I was caught in the trap once before.* Come, we will return to the laboratory."

CHAPTER VII.

FRESH MYSTIFICATION.

BUT midway across the room, Nordensterne placed his hand on the doctor's arm that was raised to turn off the gas, and pointed to the second door which has already been described as being alongside the one by which they had first entered from the main, or middle, building.

"Where does that door lead to, doctor?" he asked.

"It's secured on both sides!" replied the physician, with irrelevant crabbedness. "That door is out of use."

"Very likely; but," with firm persistence, "I demand to know since I am to occupy this apartment, what it communicates with notwithstanding."

"With Miss Haworth's apartments, by a blind corridor," was reluctantly admitted.

"Thank you, doctor. In view of what we have seen to-night it is as well that it should be secured, and doubly so, as you intimate. Now I am with you, sir."

But almost immediately on their return to the laboratory, Nordensterne, who had been poring over and piecing together many things in his mind, among which not even certain of the explosive utterances of Miss Haworth's eccentric step-father, Dr. Joseph Koffsky, were out of place, rather surprised the professor by announcing that he must be returning down-town.

"But it is still not late, sir," urged Dreamthorpe, consulting his watch; "and we have consulted together but little as yet. Let me ask you to have some refreshment before you go, at all events."

"No, thanks, doctor. It will be time enough to consult when I make my appearance as your patient to-morrow, when I can also become acquainted with your domestics at my leisure. Will the morning answer?"

"Yes; come about ten, if convenient. All shall be in readiness for your reception."

"And I shall be ready to be received, as well," with a smile, "as my extreme nervous prostration will admit. Good-night, and you need accompany me no further than to the front door."

"What!" they were now below stairs at the hall door, with both Hannibal and Johann in attendance; "after your experience out in the grounds yonder? Not to be thought of! We shall at least bear you company as far as the road. Here, Hannibal! Johann!"

But the detective was firm in his refusal of their escort, and finally had his way, leaving them standing on the piazza, before the open door, as he went off down the gloomy avenue.

"Till to-morrow, professor! and don't fear for me!" called back the detective, turning with a parting flourish of the telescopic walking-stick that had already stood him in such good stead. "If attacked again, however, I may be less chary in the use of my revolver than before."

He was speedily lost to their view among the shadows, and continued on his way with his brisk, springing step, and sufficiently on the alert.

But, whether his parting words had been overheard and accepted as a warning by such of his former assailants as might be lurking thereabouts or not, he was not again attacked, though there was still a remaining mystifying incident in store for him.

At the road-gate, a shapely black-draped figure—unquestionably the same that he had already twice encountered strangely and menacingly—suddenly glided out from under the deep shadow of an overarching evergreen, and stood there momentarily waiting, as if expecting and perhaps half-determined to accost him.

With the recollection of the terrible face that had been revealed to him in the north wing, the Flash-fingered Detective experienced an instant's sensation of recoil, that was akin to fear, but it was only for an instant.

Then his jaws came together like a steel spring-trap, his cocked revolver was in his grasp, and he bounded toward the figure like a panther on its prey.

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But presto! it was gone, melting back among the trees as if by magic, and with only a low, mocking laugh as a reminder of its having existed at all.

However, there was a rustling sound with its disappearance—ghostly garments shouldn't rustle, argued the detective to himself—and he was after it in headlong pursuit.

"Woman or witch!" he muttered, while still keeping in view what he thought to be the fugitive's outlines; "I'll solve your haunting capacity, or know the reason why."

Another low, scornful laugh borne back into his face.

Simultaneously the figure once more became comparatively distinct while about to vanish athwart a little starlighted opening among the trees.

Flash, bang! went the leveled weapon in as true a bead as he had ever drawn on target, and then—he was alone in the dim-lighted space, without sign or trace, and not even a repetition of the strange laugh to disturb the dead silence of the neglected grounds!

Retracing his steps, Nordensterne gained the public road with a sense of both disappointment and relief.

He had just turned eastward into 180th street, whose lonely character has already been referred to, when he was surprised afresh by perceiving a short, rotund man walking ahead of him, his coat-collar up over his ears—for the March wind was sharp—a fur cap pulled down to meet it, and his hands deep in the pockets of a shaggy closely-buttoned overcoat.

There was something familiar in both the shape and gait of the wayfarer, that caused the detective to overtake him without delay.

"Aha! it's Doctor Koffsky!" he exclaimed, greetingly. "How are you, Koffsky? And what brings you away up in this region?"

The man had turned with a start, so unperceived had been the detective's approach, but he was quick to recognize him in his turn.

"What! is it you, Mr. Detective Bureau?" he replied, in his wheezy, excitable way. "Well, well, I might ask the same question of you, sir. But I sha'n't. No, no; I don't care what may have been your errand hereabouts, sir. And yet all the world and his wife may know mine, if they care to. God of the Universe! Joseph Koffsky is an honest man, if he is a wronged man, and with his life and his actions transparent to those who would examine. That villain Dreamthorpe! Oh, I don't mind admitting that I have been spying around his den! The wretch, the sorcerer, the poison-distiller!" And so he rambled, or would have rambled, on in much the incoherent and hysterical vein that he had given loose to in the inspector's presence.

"So you have been spying around Dreamthorpe's Sanitarium, have you?" growled Nordensterne, abruptly interrupting him.

"That I have!" was the fumed response, accompanied by a furtive look of cunning, that was not lost upon his companion. "Hal! is there any despotic law against that, Mr. Detective? Are we in Russia, or Prussia, or—or Hindukosh? Must a scientific poisoner like this man Dreamthorpe—"

"Oh, give us a rest! What discovery has your spying resulted in? That is what I want to know."

"Indeed!" with a sudden and impudent change of tone. "Well, Mr. Central Office, suppose you wait till you do know, and without my telling it."

The detective regarded him sternly.

"Look you, Koffsky!" he said. "I have reason to believe you a suspicious character, if not a downright rascal. Now—"

"Jehovah of the Humans!" up went the fellow's hands in his hysterical foreign manner. "Are we in Peter the Great's age, or that of democratic America? Are we ruled by a czar, a sultan, an autocrat, or—"

"Shut up! And be a little less outlandish, or it may be the worse for you. Hark you, Koffsky! you once alluded to Professor Dreamthorpe's wife as not being dead at all, in your opinion, notwithstanding a general conviction to the contrary?"

"Aha!" with another cunning look. "Hein! Hein! Did I so, Mr. Detective Bureau?"

"Yes, you did!" still more sternly; "and I want to know what you meant by it."

They had now come to a pause in view of the cable road's temporary terminus, where a car was about to start.

"My dear Mr. Central Office," observed the fat little man, with a sudden blandness of composure, "you are about to take yonder car, I presume?" with a gesture as if of the same intention.

"True."

"Well, I am not. Good-evening, Mr. Detective Bureau!"

And, with a low, hand-spreading salute of mock obsequiousness, Dr. Koffsky turned up the avenue, and walked rapidly away, leaving him not a little discomfited.

CHAPTER VIII.

TALKING IT OVER WITH THE INSPECTOR.

THOUGH it was long past midnight when Nordensterne got back to Police Headquarters,

without any fresh adventure, he found Inspector Byrne waiting to receive his promised report.

This the detective speedily furnished, in the utmost detail.

The great inspector listened with the analytical acuteness and inscrutable calm that are among his well-known characteristics.

"A pretty sort of cheap theatrical hodge-podge!" he observed, reflectively, when the report was complete.

"Isn't it, though?" replied the detective, not displeased that his chief did not characterize the affair yet more uncomplimentarily.

"Do you think the alchemist is any party to the hocus-pocus?"

"No; or why should he have sought a solution of us?"

"True; I am not forgetting that."

"However, I shall study him, too, at my leisure. There is much in both his uneasiness and his reticence that are incomprehensible as yet."

"Of course the central figure of this trap is the man's wife?"

"I cannot think otherwise."

"In which case, she couldn't have met her death, as was generally believed."

"Certainly not," with a smile, "or she wouldn't be masquerading now."

"I will have the reported circumstances of her death reviewed for you; so that you needn't be turned aside from your direct investigation on that account."

"Thank you, Mr. Inspector."

"What would be the woman's object in all this haunting business?"

"To accomplish Miss Haworth's death through tampering, as a matter of course."

"Ah! the professor himself coming in as the girl's heir?"

"Yes."

"But wouldn't that argue him as in collusion with the dead-alive's murderous intention, as you might say?"

"No. Apart from his being himself puzzled and terrorized, and seeking our aid in the solution of the affair there are two considerations in his favor, as against such a possibility."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, I think him to be honest—or, at least, to want to be honest."

"That, of course, remains to be proved. But what is the other consideration?"

"He loves his beautiful patient to an extent little short of adoration."

"Ha!" thoughtfully. "And that would present a fresh stimulus on the part of the murderer?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Does the young lady return his passion?"

"I don't know. I—" the detective was about to say inadvertently, "I hope not," but cut himself short in time—"I should say not, save in a filial or trustful way."

The inspector regarded him in a quizzingly penetrative manner that few with whom he came in frequent contact (and Nordensterne was among the few) were enabled to oppose with successful dissimulation.

"A passion can't be returned in a filial and trustful way," he said, dryly.

"Say an affection, or attachment, then," was the composed response. "That is what I meant."

"Humph! And, of course, the woman is to be connected with that ruffian attack on you in the grounds?"

"To be sure. The cellar under the north wing doubtless communicates in some way with the river front by that door I told you of; and the woman could be a potent influence with a gang, you know—perhaps a gang of river and railroad thieves."

"True, true! But on whose information could they have arranged that ambuscade for you?"

"Old Koffsky's," replied Nordensterne, after a long pause. "At all events, I can think of no one else as likely to have surmised my preliminary visit to the Sanitarium."

"Yes, yes; a cunning rascal that, under all his jumping-jack excitability and other pretensions!"

"I shall not leave the Hungarian out of any of my calculations, inspector. Trust me for that!"

"What is the sum of your opinion as to the whole mystification, so far as you've gone?"

"In the first place," a little uneasily, "that it is not wholly to be explained or solved on natural grounds."

"What?" with a laugh; "you wouldn't connect it with the supernatural, so called?"

"Hardly, for I don't believe in the supernatural, as such, any more than you can do, professor. But there may be something occult and mysterious in the north wing affair, for all that."

"Karl, I thought better of you."

"Hold on before judging my credulity too hastily, inspector. I have only just alluded to the awful visage suddenly unmasked to me by the figure, or apparition, or woman, whatever we may call it, at the head of the stairs in the north wing."

"Yes; what was it like?"

"Utterly indescribable! I can only—only," the detective knitted his brows, but without wholly controlling a suggestion of recollected horror and disgust coming into his face, "liken it to the face of a galvanized corpse, with a sort of a grave or churchyard will-o'-the-wisp shining flickering through it."

"Quite grave-yardy to be sure! But I suppose you don't deny that even this may have been part and parcel of a clever trick or make-up?"

"Of course not; just the contrary to denying it. And the same trickiness may have accounted for the fugitive figure escaping my bead-drawn bullet in the grove—though you are aware that I am not accustomed to missing my aim when once getting my 'drop' on a thing."

"True," and for the first time there was a perceptible share of the detective's uncertainty, or doubtfulness, in Byrne's voice and manner. "But you grant that you may have been tricked in these two features of the mystification?"

"I do—with certain reservations," slowly. "But there are two other points therein that can't be so readily ascribed to trickery, and to the cleverest sort of Hermanesque trickery at that."

"And those are—?"

"First, the disappearance of the figure by the door in the cellar-masonry; for there was no other means by which it could have disappeared below stairs."

"Ah! Still the door might have been worked secretly."

"Granted, then, as disposing of that enigma; though you might be of another mind, had you examined the door, as I did, and found it apparently as immovable as the masonry itself. However, let that go. There remains the last difficulty—and to me an insuperable one thus far—to relegating the whole thing to the domain of trickery and claptrap on natural grounds."

"What is that?"

"The smell of blood, that accompanied the appearance of the Presence in the loft!"

"Humph! still even that might have been managed and prepared for."

"I don't see how."

"Well, I'd have liked to experience that at first hand."

"I heartily wish you might, inspector," said Nordensterne, earnestly. "And yet, cool-headed, strong-nerved skeptic that you are, I dare say that it is an experience you would not wish repeated. I tell you, it was simply overpowering—paralyzing—appalling!"

"Regular slaughter-house smell, eh?"

"Nothing of the sort! I have experienced the shambles-smell at various abattoirs, and with neither special repugnance, nor disgust, nor fear."

"What! fear?"

"Yes; fear—horror! The smell that accompanied that Presence, as its distinct, intimate association, was the smell of human blood—fresh human blood—and nothing else!"

"Wait!—And yet it disappeared with the Presence itself?"

"Yes; absolutely."

"And yet was not associated with the appearance of the same Presence, in either the one instance or the other, in the open air?"

"No, not then, I must confess." And Nordensterne scratched his head.

"There you are, then," smiling. "The smell-producing apparatus of the haunted loft was evidently not of an easily-portable nature. Have a good-night cigar, Karl; and don't let us speak of tha Presence again as if mentally spelling it with a capital P."

The detective accepted the proffered cigar, while joining in the laugh that might be said to be somewhat at his expense, and, after a few more words, the interview terminated.

CHAPTER IX.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS.

In pursuance of the plan that had been determined on, the next morning found Nordensterne regularly installed in Dr. Paracelsus Dreamthorpe's queer Sanitarium as a regular patient under his treatment.

Four or five days passed without anything of further note taking place, and during which the detective, without attempting any fresh investigation into the mysterious north wing of the building, apart from the chamber of his own occupancy, devoted himself to becoming as thoroughly acquainted as might be with his fellow-inmates.

As for the domestics, he soon made up his mind that Johann and Hannibal were stupidly faithful to their master's interests, with more or less superstitious fear in their compositions, and not to be reasonably connected with any suspicion as to any underhand agency that had been or might yet be at work.

The Tourette couple were simple Swiss folk, whom it would likewise have been absurd to associate with the mystery in any way save through the dread with which it seemed to inspire them. Indeed, both man and wife took the first occasion to inform the new patient that there was unquestionably a secret curse upon the place, in

their opinion, and that it was only the extra good wages uncomplainingly furnished them that induced them to remain in their employment. This significant admission, however, was also obtained from them—and both the coachman and the negro had expressed themselves to the same effect: That the mystery had only manifested itself subsequent to the disappearance of the doctor's wife, fourteen months previous. Prior to that, there was no haunting mystery whatever, though some trouble had occasionally arisen through the master and mistress of the house having misunderstandings with each other. Apart from all this, the Tourrettes were evidently an easy-going couple, fairly faithful to their respective duties. The husband, Alphonse, was a very tall and lean man, with much gravity of demeanor, an excellent cook, with a natural pride in his trade, and a no less scrupulous butler, without, strange to say, any surreptitious fondness for his master's wines and cordials, of which there was a choice collection under his charge. Madame Celeste, however, afforded a striking and not altogether happy contrast to her good man in several respects. She was not only very short and fat, where he was the reverse, and as good-naturedly garrulous on occasion as he was complacently reticent. The little *retrousse* nose, that her otherwise pretty face persistently carried well up in the air, was persistently and suspiciously rubicund, with a suggestiveness that could scarcely be ascribed to tight lacing, while her ordinarily merry eyes were at times sleepy-looking, with no relationship to bedtime or undue vigils, and she was wont to complain of fits of depression that seemed to evoke but little sympathy on the part of her otherwise indulgent spouse, who, moreover, had the habit of watching the bottles and decanters with extra-vigilance when they were in her proximity.

There were two others, however, with regard to whose innocence the detective was more than doubtful.

These were Maida Berlioz, Mme. Tourette's niece and assistant, and Greeta Muller, Miss Haworth's maid.

Nothing could exceed the contrariety afforded by these young women.

The dark Gypsy comeliness of the lady's maid has already been referred to. She also gave evidences of violent passions and a treacherous temper, though under good control, and was externally amiable and submissive, in an undemonstrative, taciturn way. She was of Hungarian or Bohemian extraction, and had been in her young mistress's service only since the evanishment of Madame Dreamthorpe from the Sanitarium domestic circle; having taken the place of a French maid, who had gone hence to die in one of the hospitals of a lingering and little understood disorder, Miss Haworth paying her expenses and remaining personally devoted to her to the end, so far as her own health would permit.

Maida, the Swiss girl, was the direct and pronounced opposite of Greeta in physique, temperament, and doubtless equally so in character.

She was also possessed of comeliness, and of that ultra-fair type that is sometimes designated by the expression of a colorless or washed-out blonde. It was such a fairness—with hair, eyebrows and lashes almost white and perfectly lusterless, as if wanting altogether in capillary pigment, and skin absolutely lily-like in delicacy, but seemingly incapable of impulsive floridity—as even disagreeably contrasted that of Miss Haworth, whose beauty was simply the perfection of the evanescent sea-shell coloring, sparkling animation and transparent mobility that are so fascinatingly inherent in the true poetic blonde type known as the Titianesque.

Then the Swiss was secretive where the maid was self-contained. Her blue eyes were almost equally brilliant, but less dewily so and more hard than Greeta's fine black or black-brown orbs, giving one the suggestion of sapphires. And, moreover, there was evidently a distinct antagonism, that was perhaps something more than temperamental, between the two, as if each were secretly suspicious of the other, though outwardly, so far as the detective could see, they were on the most agreeable of terms.

And yet, in spite of these contradictions, he, on his part, was equally distrustful of both.

It should be mentioned that Maida was a much older inmate of the household than Greeta. She had come there with her aunt when quite young, four or five years before the opening of our story. Soon after the professor had converted his ancestral house into a private Sanitarium for the treatment of special disorders, it being generally understood that he had heretofore conducted a similar establishment somewhere abroad.

This made her less interesting for the detective, in view of the disappearance of the professor's wife from the scene, which, in connection with the present mystery that he was desirous of solving, was now one of the central rallying points of his numerous speculations and deductions.

However, for all that, he found himself at the end of the period mentioned distrusting the blonde girl no less than the brunette, and secret-

ly determined to keep an indiscriminately close watch upon both.

And now, as to the fascinating Salome herself, his progress may be best judged by a conversation that they chanced to have on the afternoon of the day in question.

The weather, though so early in March, the proverbially treacherous month, was so sunny and yet bracing that Miss Haworth, on Dr. Dreamthorpe's advice, was indulging in an outdoor stroll along the steep river-fronting lawn back of the Sanitarium, and Nordensterne was her companion.

"Remember," he said, "at the least intimation of a sensation of chilliness, you are to let me know, Miss Haworth. Such were our good professor's orders."

She laughed lightly, turning her blue-gray eyes dancingly upon him (how well he already knew the power of those lovely eyes!) and drawing her shawl somewhat more closely about her airy form.

"Oh, of course, Mr. Nordensterne," was her reply. "You sha'n't risk a rebuke from my cousin, the learned doctor, on my account. But chilliness? The idea of such a thing in this glorious, bracing March air, and with the dream of springtide warmth in its blustering caress."

The detective held out his hand in the wind.

"You are premature in your springtide intuition, Miss Haworth," he observed.

"Why?"

"It will grow colder rapidly, and then there will be snow," he drew in a great breath of the fresh, spring-like air, "and perhaps a vast quantity of it."

She laughed, but only half-incredulously, such confidence had she already acquired in whatever this new friend of hers might say.

"I can only hope that you are at fault in your prediction," she replied; and then, having turned from contemplating the river view, she uttered a slight exclamation while glancing over the back of the Sanitarium building. "Why, they have thrown open the shutters of the north wing at last!" she cried.

"Odd that I did not notice it before!"

"It was at my suggestion," said Nordensterne. "In fact, I had Hannibal give both wings a much needed airing this morning under my directions."

She looked at him quickly. Neither unaware of the mysterious danger that menaced her, nor of the true object of the detective's sojourn at the Sanitarium, certain confidences had already passed between them.

"How did you get Papa Dreamthorpe to consent to it?" she asked.

"Simply by firmly insisting on it."

"But you—you have made no discoveries as yet?"

"No; but I have surveyed my field thoroughly, and am about getting down to business. But bless me! you are ill, Miss Haworth!" Her countenance had changed, and she was pressing a hand to her chest. "You must return to the house at once. Come!"

But she smiled a strange fluttering little smile, shook her head, and supported herself by lightly touching his arm with her disengaged hand.

"It is nothing—at least, I hope so, Mr. Nordensterne," faintly. "Still, I—I am afraid my night-draught may have been tampered with again." A look of terror came into her face.

Here Doctor Dreamthorpe was seen approaching them leisurely from the offices.

A single glance at Salome caused him to quicken his pace, and throw his arms around her.

"Come!" he exclaimed, with forced calmness, while throwing a look of undisguised consternation over her head at the detective; "you are not so well as you were, Salome."

CHAPTER X.

THE FRESH ALARM.

A LITTLE later on Nordensterne was pacing the floor of Doctor Dreamthorpe's laboratory, while casting occasional impatient glances at the *portiere* leading to Miss Haworth's apartments, into which the physician had hurriedly disappeared with his fair patient directly upon their return from the grounds.

Presently the professor reappeared, with a relieved look in his face that somewhat dissipated the detective's anxiety.

"Ah, nothing serious, then?"

"No; very fortunately."

"Still, there has been fresh tampering?"

"I suppose," uneasily, "Miss Haworth herself hinted that to you?"

"She did. Has there?"

"Yes," reluctantly; "the symptoms indicate it."

"Tampering with Miss Haworth's night-draught?"

"Yes; of course it couldn't have been with the regular daily dose, which you have seen me distill and administer every evening."

"But I understood you to say that that was the sole medicine administered."

"So it is, of a counteractive character. But my patient is troubled with fluctuating insomnia, as a consequence. That is, her nightly rest is apt to consist of a series of short sleeps, from each of which she would awake nervous and

wakeful, but for the composing draught at her bedside. A sip or two of this sends her off again, so that she is enabled to obtain her full night's rest, though piecemeal, as it were. However, the draught is not always necessary. Sometimes she sleeps uninterruptedly without it."

"Who administers the sleeping draught when required?"

"Greeta, Miss Haworth's maid, when awake! Otherwise she helps herself to the prescribed spoonful."

"Does not Greeta watch all night at her mistress's side, as one of her duties?"

"No; or with no regularity. It should be so, but Miss Haworth is singularly indulgent with her maids."

"I should say so. Where does Greeta sleep?"

"In a small room directly communicating with Miss Haworth's."

"Look here, doctor," said the detective, a little sharply, "the tampering heretofore has always been with the night-draught, I suppose?"

"Always."

"Why has it not occurred to you to suspect the girl, Greeta?"

"It would have occurred to me but for two reasons," replied Dreamthorpe, earnestly. "Of course, it would."

"What are those reasons?"

"First, her affection for her mistress."

"That might be assumed. Your next reason."

"It seems to me insuperable. The sleeping potion is in itself harmless—a mild soporific. The tampering with it has in each instance been of the same character, as I have discovered by subsequent analysis. It has consisted of a secret mixture with the potion of a few drops of a certain poison in just sufficient quantity to undo the counteractive effects of the daily antidote given every evening; in other words, to set back the patient where she was before, to which must be added a fresh nervous shock. It is this that I most fear." And the physician, who had seated himself, while Nordensterne remained standing, knitted his brows wearily. "I hope I make myself plain to your unscientific understanding."

"You do, sir," was the reply. "But what of all this with regard to clearing the girl Greeta of suspicion?"

"The girl is too ignorant to know the exact quantity of this poison to administer without causing instant death. Moreover, it is simply impossible that any of it should be in her possession."

"Impossible! Is the poison, then, so secret, or so little known?"

"Yes; it is a discovery of my own. There is but little of it in the world, and all of that little is most probably under lock and key in yonder cabinet," pointing to a small closet not far from the laboratory furnace.

"And is the secret of this mysterious poison known only to yourself?"

"Yes, now."

"What do you mean by that, professor?"

Dreamthorpe paused, and then answered in a hollow voice:

"It was known to one other person, and she is no more."

"You allude to your wife, Madame Therese?"

The professor bowed his head. But here Nordensterne could contain himself no longer.

"Look here!" he cried. "The mysterious poisoner is the mysterious haunter of the north wing, and that creature can be none other than Madame Therese herself, who cannot have died at all. Oh, do not whiten or shake your head! It must be so. There was some mistake. I know something of that woman's history—perhaps more than you can suppose."

Dreamthorpe suddenly grasped his wrist, a terrible look—a look it seemed both of fear and curiosity—coming into his face.

"What do you know?" he demanded, huskily.

The detective determined to strike out boldly, if only from guesswork.

He deliberately disengaged his wrist, and seated himself directly facing his companion.

"I know this much," he said, eying him steadily, but benevolently: "That you lived unhealthily with your wife, that you were comparatively poor, that she importuned you to destroy your wealth, that, doubtless in consequence of your horrified refusal to do this (and perhaps, moreover, inspired by jealousy of the young lady's youth and beauty), she fled your house and your outraged presence—possibly after herself administering to Miss Haworth the devastating poisonous dose that you are even to this day engaged so laboriously and conscientiously counteracting!"

It was a bold and brilliant piece of sheer conjecturing on the part of the detective, but it seemed to utterly fail of its mark.

Dreamthorpe, after a single start of astonishment, if not of alarm, had grown thoroughly composed.

"You know nothing of the sort," he replied, coldly and contemptuously. "You have either been talking with that malicious idiot, Koffsky, or this is merely your imagination. For the rest, I know my wife is dead, for I identified and buried her mangled remains."

"Who, then, can this mysterious haunter of the north wing be?"

"I don't know," in a troubled voice. "Perhaps her sister. Therese had such a one, who resembled her not a little."

Though this was a surprising piece of information for the detective, he suddenly dropped the subject altogether.

He arose and glanced up and down the laboratory keenly.

"Could the tamperer," he asked, "find entrance into Miss Haworth's rooms through this apartment?"

"I do not see how it would be possible," replied Dreamthorpe. "I always lock yonder hall-entrance before retiring to my own room in there for the night, and you are the only one to whom I have given a duplicate key."

"Suppose you accompany me to my room," suggested Nordensterne.

Dreamthorpe did so, and when they had lighted the gas, the detective pointed to the door already described as communicating with Miss Haworth's apartments.

"That is then the door," he said, "by which this secret midnight foe obtains access to the patient's bedside."

He tried it, as he had done more than once before, but only to find it immovably fastened.

"It is locked and bolted within," observed the professor.

"Where is the key?" demanded the detective.

"In the locked cabinet of my cabinet that I indicated to you as containing the unique poison so cunningly used by the tamperer."

"Is there a duplicate?"

"None that I am aware of. In fact, I am quite sure that there is not."

The detective dragged the heavy bedstead around, so that it lay directly across the door and hard against it; an exhibition of unlooked-for strength on his part that did not appear to ruffle him in the least.

"There!" said he. "If that door is to be meddled with again to-night, it shall be over my dead or insensible body."

Here the shrieking of the wind and the whipping of snow or sleet upon the window-panes, caused him to throw one of the sashes open, thus causing an inroad of bitter cold air and driving snow out of the darkness.

"It is as I predicted to Miss Haworth," he observed, quickly shutting the window, "Notwithstanding the lateness of the season, a violent, perhaps an unprecedented snow-storm is at hand."

He was right. This was the Sunday night of March 11, 1888, and the memorable blizzard that ensued was already piling up its white drifts, wildly winnowed out from the snow-burdened chariots of the freezing northwest wind.

CHAPTER XI. ON GUARD.

DR. DREAMTHORPE uttered some dissent to Nordensterne's weather-opinion as the latter closed the window, and then said:

"Mr. Nordensterne, I will willingly keep you company on your watch here to-night, if you say so."

"No, thank you, doctor," was the reply. "I prefer to stand guard alone."

Dreamthorpe colored, and looked at him appealingly.

"I—I hope you don't doubt my honesty in all this, Nordensterne?" he said.

The detective instantly grasped his hand with unaffected heartiness.

In fact, he had studied his host more thoroughly and searchingly for the past few days than the latter could have any idea of, and, while satisfied that he was not altogether frank as to his own suspicions, was perfectly convinced as to his personal honesty and good faith.

"Not for an instant, my dear sir!" cried Nordensterne. "Make yourself easy on that score. But it mustn't be forgotten that you are to guard the laboratory entrance to the young lady's apartments, while I am responsible for this one."

Dr. Dreamthorpe seemed greatly relieved, and brightened up amazingly.

"Between us," he exclaimed, energetically, "we ought soon to bring this accursed mystery to an end, and rid my loving patient of her peril."

"Oh, we'll do it!" cried Nordensterne, confidently. "Never fear. But isn't it almost dinner time?"

"Yes; but wait," the detective was about to partly turn down the gas preparatory to quitting the room. "What is your own plan for the night, allow me to ask?"

"To lie awake yonder, perhaps reading, while waiting for developments." Nordensterne pointed to the bed.

"But should anything occur—should there be an intrusion from yonder?" with a significant glance at the opposite door leading along into the dreaded north wing region.

"I shall simply," was the cool response, "repel the intruder and hunt him or her down in yonder to the heart of the mystery—ay, and down through the subterranean passage to the river front, if necessary."

"What! not again and alone?"

"Certainly. Never fear for me: I shall not be unprepared."

But, as they turned to go, the doctor grasped his arm.

"You know the horror I have hinted at in yonder," he said, impressively. "Let me warn you again. Don't go in there between the hours of midnight and dawn."

"The deuce, doctor! I have already announced my intention."

Dreamthorpe said nothing more, and they then went to dinner.

Miss Haworth was not present, as it was mostly her custom to dine in her rooms.

The doctor was a good and even elegant provider. They sat down to the meal alone. It was in a well-warmed, old-fashioned dining-room, that was on the ground floor almost directly under the laboratory. They were waited on by Tourette, the dignified cook and butler, in person, while now and then in the course of the repast Maida Berlioz made her appearance with some hot dish from the kitchens in the rear, where Madame Tourette was on duty.

The doctor and his guest (or patient, as the detective pretended to be) made it a point to converse on general and indifferent subjects, save when alone.

They had been doing so for some time now when the young woman, in passing behind the detective touched his shoulder, with something like a caressing, or a least a lingering, touch.

Now this was not the first time that the ultra-blonde niece of the Tourettes had manifested her susceptibility to the detective's good looks, though thus far she had contented herself with covert and half-downcast glances from her cold but brilliant sapphire-like eyes to that effect.

Unperceived by Dreamthorpe, he looked at the girl in surprise, and saw a look as of alarm and warning in her usually impassive face.

She instantly, however, changed its expression to a merely troubled look as the professor's attention was directed toward her.

"What is the matter, Maida?" asked Dreamthorpe. "You seem disturbed."

"It is the frightful storm, monsieur," replied the girl. "The snow is already invading the kitchen porch in great heaps, and even Maman Tourette does not know what to make of it."

"Pish!" grumbled the doctor, impatiently. "A springtide snowfall, which the sun of tomorrow will doubtless cause to disappear—though perhaps to the flooding of our cellars, if we do not look out."

"Ah, but if monsieur the doctor will allow me?" interposed the grave butler, who was something more than a privileged domestic, and he leaned a little forward, with his napkin over his arm.

"Well, Alphonse, what is it?"

"Of course, I shall look out for the cellar, monsieur. But the storm, it is really something appalling!"

"Appalling?"

"Extraordinary, at least, monsieur. The temperature is lowering rapidly, and yet the snowfall comes heavier and heavier—a most unusual thing, monsieur."

"Very likely. Has Miss Haworth's dinner gone up to her?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. My wife took it up before you sat down to table."

"Then bring in the dessert, and let the storm take care of itself."

The doctor then resumed with Nordensterne the discussion of a scientific subject that had been interrupted, and the repast was presently finished.

"I will rejoin you in your laboratory," observed the detective as they were quitting the room together.

He accordingly went back through the hall toward the kitchen, in which he was quite sure that both Johann and Hannibal would by this time be waiting for their dinners.

When he returned he carried over his arm a rubber coat and high boots, which he had succeeded in borrowing from the German coachman against a possible emergency that he had in his mind.

"Monsieur," said a soft, timid voice in his ear on his way up-stairs, "do not refuse to let me say a word to you."

It was Maida, and again the girl's light touch fell upon his shoulder as he was making the turn of the first landing, where the light both from the hall below and the passage above was comparatively shut away.

She looked by no means unattractive, though at the same time somewhat unreal and sprite-like by reason of her excessive fairness, as she stood there half-shrinking, with uplifted hand and her cold, bright eyes fixed upon him.

Nordensterne regarded her with perfect calmness, for he honestly felt it as no compliment that this young woman should have manifested a liking and perhaps an admiration for him.

"Refuse? of course not," he replied. "What would you say to me, Maida?"

"Only this, monsieur," she seemed laboring under suppressed excitement. "Don't occupy your own room to-night. There is another, and equally comfortable, apart from that odious north wing, that you can have for the asking."

"Why do you tell me this?" he demanded, sternly. "What is there to be feared in my present quarters?"

"I cannot tell you—that is, I do not know," in confusion, which, however, was quickly merged into a sort of wary or sullen composure. "I—I merely have an uncontrolled impression that there may be danger—great danger—for you there."

"Is that all?" he grasped her wrist roughly. "Only an impression—nothing more? Girl, you are sure of it?"

"Yes, yes, nothing more, indeed, monsieur. Oh, but you are hurting me!"

He released her wrist with a muttered apology.

"You will not heed my warning then monsieur?"

"Not I!"

She hesitated, then turned, darted down the steps, and disappeared without another word.

"Humph!" growled Nordensterne to himself. "This bloodless beauty bids fair to outdo Miss Haworth's Gypsy maid herself in the mysteriously gushing line."

Accordingly, in no very contented mood, he went to his room, where he deposited his borrowed traps, and saw that everything was in the order he had left it, with a good fire glowing in the grate.

He then went to the laboratory intending to remain there with the doctor until Miss Haworth should have taken her daily dose and retired, if indeed she should prove equal to it after the bad turn of the afternoon.

But Dr. Dreamthorpe, who was already preparing for the distillation, looked up with a smile of perfectly restored confidence.

"Salome is already quite herself again," he said, very cheerfully. "Indeed, she will be well able to take her prescription presently, although I feared at one time that it would have to go over for one day."

Nordensterne expressed his gratification, and then, looking thoughtfully at the *portiere* entrance to the young lady's apartments, he said, abruptly:

"Doctor, if nothing in the way of a disclosure comes of my vigil this night, or if the attempt to tamper with her night draught should be repeated, I must make a thorough professional examination of the young lady's apartments."

CHAPTER XII.

THE THRESHOLD OF SUSPENSE.

DOCTOR DREAMTHORPE frowned slightly at this announcement.

Was he already somewhat jealous of the detective's youth and good looks? Nordensterne was not certain of this, nor for the present did he greatly care, so earnest was he to reach a speedy and thorough result in the business in hand.

"I doubt if Miss Haworth would consider that either necessary or proper, Mr. Nordensterne," replied the professor, slowly.

"I presume you to be perfectly honest, sir," observed the detective, bluntly, "in having the young lady rid of this mysterious menace to her safety as soon as possible?"

"Why, of course I am," was the reply. "You ought to know that."

"Yes? Well, then, I shall make the proposed examination at my earliest convenience, whether the young lady deems it proper or not."

He might have said more but for a warning rustle in the adjoining passage, and then Miss Haworth entered as usual, attended by Greeta.

She looked a little paler than ordinarily, but greeted both "Papa Dreamthorpe" and Nordensterne with her accustomed smile, as she seated herself half-recliningly on the divan, said that she had enjoyed her dinner, and was none the worse for her indisposition of a few hours before.

She then chatted with the detective over the snowfall, while sipping at the freshly distilled medicine handed her by the doctor, saying laughingly that he ought to set up as a weather prophet forthwith.

Nordensterne, however, went directly to the thought that was upon his mind with but little delay.

"Miss Haworth," said he gravely, "don't you experience any alarm lest your night-draught may again be tampered with?"

It was a fine trait of Miss Haworth that she could instantly meet such a question unhesitatingly and with becoming seriousness.

"No," was her prompt answer. "The fact is, Mr. Nordensterne," quietly, "that I don't believe I was ever afraid of anything in my life."

"Still," admiringly, "you will naturally take precautions?"

"I have already determined upon them. Greeta will sit by me all night. And, should I be roused by one of my sleepless fits to find her sleeping in her easy-chair, I shall merely stand it out by not touching the draught at all."

Nordensterne bowed approvingly, but Doctor Dreamthorpe at once interposed.

"It will never do, Salome," he said, firmly. "One night thus passed in sleeplessness might disturb your nervous system most seriously. In the case that you suppose, wake up Greeta and send her for me instantly. I will examine

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the draught, and see that it is pure, or prepare a fresh one for you on the spot."

"Just as you say, Papa Dreamthorpe," murmured Salome, submissively.

The professor thanked her, but with a slight, scarcely perceptible movement of impatience, which the keen-eyed detective had remarked, as was his custom whenever addressed thus jocosely by the young lady, though she could scarcely be aware of his implied dislike for it, inasmuch as he seldom addressed him otherwise, probably by force of habit.

But Nordensterne felt emboldened by reason of her suavity, and in spite of a look of positive annoyance on the part of Dreamthorpe, to mention his proposition to make a thorough examination of her apartments—say on the following day, if it might prove convenient.

Much to his satisfaction, she not only promptly expressed her assent, but even seemed to appreciate the importance of the suggestion.

Greeta, however, lowered her brilliant black eyes (which for the most part she had, according to her custom, kept constantly fixed upon him), and it struck the detective that she was less pleased than her young mistress at the proposition.

Almost immediately after this Miss Haworth said good-night, and withdrew.

"I am glad Salome seemed to fall in with your proposition so readily, Nordensterne," observed Dr. Dreamthorpe, not a little hypocritically, the detective could not help thinking. "I feared the reverse."

A little later on the detective took up a couple of magazines from the table, and bade the professor good-night.

He had barely, however, closed the door of his room behind him, when there came a slight tap upon it.

The girl Greeta was disclosed there in waiting, and Nordensterne bit his lip to restrain an expression of impatience, if not of anger.

If the truth must be told, the complaisance of this dark young woman toward him was no more to his taste than that of the blonde Maida.

But Greeta, though usually reticent and mysterious in the main, could be far bolder and perhaps more reckless on occasion than the Swiss girl.

"Mr. Nordensterne," she said, "I have taken the liberty to come to you with a friendly warning."

"You are very kind, Greeta," he replied, perhaps a little ironically, and persistently keeping his visitor standing in the passage. "Did your young mistress send you with it?"

Her handsome eyes snapped a little, and she was evidently not pleased.

"My mistress!" she exclaimed. "But you know she could not have done so; though doubtless," with an angry, searching look, "you would be far better gratified if she had?"

"Why do you come here?" roughly.

"To warn you, though perhaps you don't deserve it."

"Well, warn away!"

"I wouldn't occupy this room to-night, if I were you, Mr. Nordensterne."

This was said with real earnestness.

"Why?" asked Nordensterne, dryly.

"It is not a good room—it is in the haunted wing," she laughed.

"I wish you a good-evening, Greeta," a little contemptuously.

"You will not heed my warning, then?"

"Young woman, take care!" was the irrelevant response.

"What do you mean, Mr. Nordensterne? What should I take care of?"

"That Miss Haworth's night draught is not tampered with again."

"Good God, sir!" in unaffected astonishment and alarm; "you surely cannot suspect me of such treachery to my mistress?"

"I am glad you understand me."

"Oh, sir, but believe me!" she clasped her hands, her foreign accent, though not very pronounced, giving an additional earnestness to her words; "this is not right—you are wronging me deeply by such a suspicion."

"Am I? Well, I'll see about that after my examination of Miss Haworth's suite of rooms. You didn't relish it at all when I made the proposition to her."

Greeta changed countenance, though seemingly not in a guilty way, and then her face and manner seemed to harden.

"That was different and natural enough," she said. "But you are a man, and can't understand."

"Miss Haworth herself saw no objection to it."

"Ha!" angrily. "And," with a flashing look of scrutiny, "if she were here now in my place, this same friendly warning of mine from her lips—"

"Are you going?" he interrupted, peremptorily.

Her dark face flushed with rage, and then, looking him piercingly in the face, she said: "Mr. Nordensterne, if anything happens to you, you can blame yourself for it." Then she hurried away.

Nordensterne closed and locked the door, and

then began his preparations for the night while thinking matters over.

Were both Maida and Greeta in secret league with the mysterious woman in black, and perhaps each at the same time ignorant of the other's complicity? for that there was a natural antagonism between the two young women he had long before this assured himself.

It was an aggravating enough enigma here on the threshold of the suspenseful night that was before him, but he managed to dismiss it at least temporarily from his thoughts.

At last everything was serene, the quaint, stately old room brightly lighted, and with the heaped-up coal fire glowing warmly in the grate.

He went to one of the river-fronting windows, and, shading his eyes, strove to look out on the night through the frosty panes.

It seemed to have grown bitterly cold and to be still snowing heavily, while the wind shrieked around the chimneys and angles.

Here and there some of the cold air entered at the sides of the sash, driving particles of snow with it.

Nordensterne but partly undressed, and then, lying down on the bed so as to command both the light for reading and at a glance the opposite door leading out into the haunted wing, opened one of the magazines, and soon found an article in which he could interest himself.

The door alluded to had been locked with special care, and he had its key, obtained from the professor several days previous, in his pocket.

His watch, which marked half-past nine, lay on a little table between the head of his bed and the fire in an oblique direction.

On this table also lay one of his revolvers within easy reach.

Another was under the vacant pillow between where he lay on the outside of the great double bed and the door that he was guarding, and against which the side of the bedstead was tightly pressed.

He lay reading for some time in a desultory fashion, with an occasional glance either at the fire or the opposite door; but gradually became enmeshed by the article he was reading.

He was presently aroused to alertness by a singular circumstance, when by a look at the open watch beside him he noted that it was a quarter to eleven.

That circumstance was, or seemed to be, a faint sense of the fresh blood-smell from the adjoining corridor and loft.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAUNTERS AND THE HAUNTED.

LIGHTLY and noiselessly, the detective slipped off the bed, grasping the revolver that had lain under the pillow.

He then crossed the floor resolutely to the door, unlocked and threw it open.

But before this the smell, or suspicion of a smell, had wholly disappeared, nor was there a further suggestion of it even in the corridor beyond.

Had he been mistaken?

He peered down the short gallery to the door closing its end—the fateful door which, on the occasion of his exploration with the professor, had proved the *open sesame* to the mysterious horror beyond, and of which he also possessed the key.

Should he not now take up the exploration afresh, and once for all end the wearing suspense of the thing?

No; he reflected that this would be to leave the communication to Salome's bedside unguarded.

Besides, it was nothing like twelve o'clock as yet, the fateful hour of the haunted wing, according to Dreamthorpe; and, moreover, the cold air that came to him out of the corridor was untainted by the faintest suspicion of the sanguinary smell.

In addition to this, he had oddly enough been reading a magazine story of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, in which the stench of blood from the multitudinous victims in the narrow streets and along the quays of mediæval Paris had been dramatically dwelt upon by the writer, so that it all might well have been a freak of his over-stimulated imagination.

Having come to this conclusion, Nordensterne relocked the door, and once more lay down, though not to resume his reading.

He resolved to merely think and watch, which he doubted not his ability to do successfully, inasmuch as, in contemplation of some such vigil as this, he had fortified himself by a long and solid preparatory nap early in the foregoing afternoon, even before Miss Haworth's sudden seizure had strengthened and confirmed the intention.

And now, with his eyes for the most part fastened upon that door, what a flood of thoughts chased each other through his mind in connection with this mysterious investigation.

First, they were naturally enough centered about the strange and beautiful personality of Salome herself.

What had been her first experience in the Sanitarium prior to the disappearance of Madame Therese, the doctor's wife? Had he blindly stumbled on the right clew in those bold con-

jectural words that he had hazarded to Dreamthorpe but a few hours previous? And why did she, with her youth, her wealth, her beauty, her cleverness, linger in this lonely place, subject to the secret and deadly insecurity that so obviously menaced her, when she might so easily secure his services—supposing them uniquely indispensable for effecting her restoration to health—in a fashionable hotel, or amid other pleasing and perfectly safe environments? Could the physician have succeeded in persuading her that this solitary and perilous seclusion was absolutely necessary as a concomitant to the successful practice of his treatment? Or, still worse, could it be that she—? But no, she could not love him! Nordensterne repelled the mere suggestion with a fast-beating heart and a rush of angry fever in his veins, as, it must be confessed, he had come to do rather frequently of late.

In fact, Greeta's taunting innuendo regarding the possible state of his own sentiments for the beautiful patient had touched him more nearly than he would have been willing to confess.

From the pleasing subject of Salome the detective's thoughts wandered to Dr. Dreamthorpe himself, and the mysterious characteristics that he had presented since their acquaintance.

Might there be truth in this man's claim of having lived for a couple of centuries or more, and perhaps with the chance of still defying the natural destroyer indefinitely? At all events, Nordensterne found himself no longer able to scoff at the notion as being absolutely incredible. But then, admitting the probability of such a thing, was not Salome all the more to be saved from a marriage with such a being? A sacrifice of youth and beauty on the altar of a Moloch of the occult and the unnatural too hideous to be thought of for an instant!

And then that sister of Madame Therese whom Dreamthorpe had only for the first time alluded to that evening? Was there, or had there been, such a person? or was it only a newly conceived fiction, and a consequent dishonest deepening of the mystery, on the part of the professor himself?

Since his taking up his residence at the Sanitarium, Nordensterne, it should be mentioned, had made one more personal report to his chieftain. It was at the close of the second day. The inspector had by that time, through one of his trusted agents, investigated the alleged tragic death of Madame Therese Dreamthorpe, by railroad accident in the mountains of Pennsylvania a twelvemonth previous.

There had been a wreck and a fire. Among numerous other victims, the woman's body had been taken out in a frightfully charred and disfigured condition. But the inspector was satisfied that the professor had made the subsequent identification in good faith. And, as he had not mentioned any knowledge of a sister closely resembling the woman, the detective inferred that he was as ignorant as himself on that point, and was therefore all the more willing to suspect Dreamthorpe's sincerity in this regard, though of course he could satisfy himself more thoroughly by future inquiry.

This only brought forward yet more pronouncedly the all-important enigma. Who and what then was the being in black, the veiled haunter of the north wing?

Apart from this baffling question, Nordensterne's next speculations were occupied, by a sort of natural sequence, with the young women, Maida Berlioz and Greeta Muller.

Were they sincere or hypocritical in their apparent antagonism toward one another? Sincere or hypocritical in their manifestations of good will, if not of a tenderer feeling, for himself personally? If dissimulative in this, why had they undertaken to severally warn him of danger? And if sincere in their warnings, how could it be otherwise than that they were the woman in black's accomplices?

"I know what I'll do," thought the detective, in a fit of exasperation over the muddle in which these final speculations at last entangled him. "I'll set the one against the other, the blonde against the brunette, if it is to be done at all, and soon get to the bottom of their part of the mystery, at all events."

Then there came upon him, without an instant's warning, a sort of magnetic shock.

It brought him into a sitting posture, after which he fell back perfectly helpless.

Then the blood-smell filled the room with stifling intensity, there was the low, melodiously mocking laugh that he so well remembered (the laugh of a demoness or a maniac, he could never determine which,) the door upon which his dazed eyes were fixed swung noiselessly in on its hinges, as if its fastenings were suddenly dissolved away, and the veiled woman in black was in the room.

A charm was upon the young man's visage. He seemed to be only conscious of her, and with painful, minute distinctness, while everything else was in a confused mist.

He was at the same time absolutely helpless, as if incased in hardened plaster, while the loathsome, horrifying slaughter-smell was in his nostrils, his breast, his lungs, a choking, agonizing stench!

A gleaming dagger was clutched in the being's white right hand, which was drawn up closely

against her bosom, so as to slightly ruffle the dead-black fleeciness of the veil that concealed the head and face, mingling indefinitely with the pall-like garmenting of the ample, statuesque and stately figure.

The left hand hung at her side, holding something that might have been a white-paper packet or a small vial, he could not tell which.

Two luminous spots appeared upon, or rather through, her veil.

They were the creature's eyes, or the glare of them, which were fixed upon him with a basilisk intensity of malice and hatred that might well have appalled even a stouter heart than Nordensterne's under the best of circumstances for resistance or defense, but which now, in his hopelessly paralyzed condition, were a worthy accessory of the blood-smell in their dismaying, prostrating effect.

An instant's terrible pause, and then, with a faint repetition of that rippling little laugh, she moved glidingly across the floor toward the couch.

Pausing at the fire, she threw into it from the loosely-hanging hand a powder or a liquid, that at once caused it to blaze up, filling the room with a sort of lurid mist, in the midst of which her own ominous figure was still the only definite center of the spell-bound detective's gaze, after which the fire itself seemed to suddenly deaden out.

Then, with a grand, soundless sweep, she was at his side, standing over him, with her poniard raised over his defenseless throat.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCANNY WORK.

BUT what could it all mean?

While the keen blade was yet poised aloft for its pitiless stroke, the would-be murderer's arm seemed to be seized and stayed.

And then was that Maida's voice, or the voice in a dream?

"Madame, you shall not!" it seemed to exclaim, in a hoarse, determined whisper. "It is not necessary to kill him. Besides—hold your hand, I say, or by the Virgin Mother, I will betray you, give you up!—besides, well, I love him. What! do not think to fright me with your ghost-tricks and fierce looks."

There was, or seemed to be, a low, snarling, hissing sound in response, as of a tigress slowly, unwillingly relinquishing the coveted prey already in the clutch of her unsheathed talons.

But the upraised hand fell harmlessly, and the veiled figure drew back or to one side from the detective's tranced gaze.

Then, and at the same instant, what was this?

A movement at the door, the guarded door, leading into Salome's apartments? or only, perhaps like the rest, part and parcel of the trance-spell which held the prostrate man stone-like in its invisible chains?

At all events, the bed on which he lay seemed to be silently but strongly swung around to its original position.

Then the creak of the door, a rushing entrance, a surprised, angry gasp.

Then was it Greeta's voice, also in a hoarse whisper, in furious, though suppressed altercation with the Swiss blonde's, with the veiled unknown's in occasional and finally successful interposition? Or was it all but a sequence of the same nightmare dream, foreshadowed by what should or ought to follow in the dreamer's own consciousness?

"You here?" exclaimed, or seemed to exclaim, the first voice. "What is he to you?"

"Yes, I!" from the second, more coldly, but with equal defiance. "And what may you idiotically deem he is to you?"

"I love him!"

"So do I!"

"Little good it may do you, with your colorless automaton's face."

"Ha! And would he care for such smartness as yours? He would then have searched Nubia ere now."

"Peace!" half in anger, half in fear, from the third voice—the same deadly voice (if not merely dream-born, with the others,) that had counseled, "Kill him, kill him! Why don't you kill him?" at the time of the ruffianly attack in the Sanitarium grounds. "What! peace, I say. Would ye ruin all with your accursed bickerings?"

Still there was a momentary sound of hard-breathed scuffling, as if the owners of the younger voices might be laying hold of one another.

But there was then a swift, sweeping rustle, as of an interposition, and it instantly ceased, as the hoarser and older whisper went on to say chidingly:

"Fool! do you not know that this marplot cares for neither of you any more than the dust under his feet? That it is Salome herself whom he yearns to fly at with his falcon flight? Ha!" there was an interval of indistinct murmurs and hard breathings; "it is as I say. But both of you must have suspected it before this. Now would either of you stand between him and my avenging knife?"

There was another movement toward the couch, and the threatening black-robed figure

was again in the line of the detective's tranced vision; but only to be dragged away again, amid confused and frightened whisperings in both the other voices of "No, no, not death! It shall not be!"

"So be it then," resignedly, in response. "The evil consequences, if any, be upon your own heads, not on mine, which is sufficiently secure!"

Then Nordensterne experienced a sort of nervous shock, the combined blood-smell and evil glare deepened, as it were, till altogether unendurable, and he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself it was really as himself again.

He sprung up, seating himself on the side of the bed, and looking about him in momentary bewilderment.

Was it absolutely all but a dream, then, a hideous phantasmagoria of the sleep-betrayed faculties?

The couch was as he had left it, pressed hard against the guarded door.

There was neither smell nor unnatural glare—nothing but the cozy air of the warmed room, with a mere suggestion of external wintriness from the storm howling without and the wind-driven snow-particles whipping and lashing the window-panes—the cheerful gaslight, the soft glow of the anthracite live coals under their unconsumed topping in the grate.

But, half-glamoured as he still felt himself to be, Nordensterne was not satisfied that it was all but a dream.

We may dream realistically, even with exceptional vividness, but—a sudden pain in his left wrist caused him to examine it.

It was bleeding from a slight scratch, such as might have been made by the sudden and reluctant lowering of the clutched dagger-point that had, or had seemed, to be stayed when first threatening his bared throat.

He fairly leaped across the room, and examined the door there.

Fastened apparently as undisturbedly as when he had last looked to it!

Still, the wound on his wrist remained.

He next whirled around the bed, and examined the guarded door.

It was unsecured, with evidence enough to his experienced eye of both lock and inside bolt having been picked or trained back with the swift cleverness of a master hand.

To complete his attire, conceal his pistols on his person, fling open the door, and spring noiselessly along the narrow, carpeted corridor into which it led, was the work of little more than an instant with the Flash-fingered detective.

A closed door barred the end of the gallery.

Was it the immediate entrance to Salome's bed-chamber, as seemed most probable?

An instant's hesitation, the instinct of a noble and modest manliness, and then he had soundlessly opened it and crossed the threshold.

He was in a roomy and exquisite boudoir, that was softly lighted by a glimmering gas-jet, globed with delicate crystal of pink and blue tintings, tenderly suggestive as those of the fairest sea-shell orifice, bare on a tropical beach, and lulled by the soft pulsings from the bosom of the Indian deep.

Nordensterne instinctively paused, on tiptoe, and held his breath, looking about him, with perhaps even less of the curiosity, that was certainly not unpardonable under the circumstances, than a sense of uneasiness and shame.

He had often heard and read of such delectable penetrality pertaining to the indulged fair ones of the very rich and super-refined; in fact, he had once assisted at a search for smuggled lace and diamonds in the boudoir of a French countess adventuress, which had been described in the papers as a luxurious marvel, the sybaritic perfection of upholstering and decorative art; but the recollection of it was as a tawdry stage-setting—all that he had otherwise imagined was cheap and garish, or at best unworthy, compared to the rich yet simple purity of the fairy-like interior in which he now, by such strange necessity of fortune found himself.

It was as if a beautiful and an angelic soul, a sweet maidenliness, of the earth not earthy, had informed and sanctified it by her daily familiarity therewith, the bright trysting-place of her sunnier hours no less than the secluded cloister of her lonely communings with her secret self.

And this sacred spot to have been profaned by the midnight stateliness of that veiled presence, by the snake-like gliding of that murderous step!

Nordensterne's brow darkened and his hands clinched themselves.

The pause, much as passed through his thoughts during its continuance, was but for a fleeting instant.

Even that atom of delay might mean new peril, perhaps death itself, for his adored—for the dear occupant of the adjoining chamber!

The latter was separated from the boudoir by an arched opening, curtained by a rich *portiere*, partly drawn back, through which the glimmer of a night taper could be made out as blending with the gentle but still stronger effulgence of the dressing-room itself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ALARM.

AFTER another instant of yet more pronounced hesitation, the detective entered the chamber.

By a richly canopied and curtained couch, the curtains of which were but partly drawn on the side nearest to him, sat or partly reclined a young girl apparently fast asleep in a luxuriously upholstered easy-chair.

Between her and the bed was a small inlaid table, on which was the taper swimming flickeringly on the oily contents of its silver cup, and a glass containing a colorless liquid, with a spoon lying across the brim.

A door directly opposite communicated with a smaller and humbler apartment, which was doubtless the maid's b'ichamber.

Another door to the right, hung with a narrow *portiere* should have led into the passage communicating with Professor Dreamthorpe's laboratory.

Deep in between the parted hangings of the couch was the shadowy outline, underneath snowy coverings, of the sleeping patient, the tender taken breathing of whose slumber could be just distinguished, or rather suggested, amid the dead stillness of the surroundings, while that of the sleeping girl watcher—if indeed she unfeignedly slept, which was a question—was distinctly audible.

A single window, simply curtained with white lace, was at the foot of the couch.

Indeed, white was everywhere, with delicate suggestions of blue where any color at all was manifest, and the general air of virgin purity and exclusiveness was as omnipresent as in the preceding and richer apartment.

The intruder upon this sanctity of maiden rest paused yet again, and this time in little less than an agony of diffidence and hesitation.

But another glance at the glass containing the night-draught (heavens! perhaps it had already been partaken of after again being tampered with, though this was extremely improbable) was sufficient to rouse his accustomed resolution to the sticking-point.

He crossed the floor with a purposely heavy tread, drew the bed-curtains close with a swift movement, and then, grasping the maid by the shoulder, shook her roughly.

"Wake up, Greeta, wake up!" he exclaimed, in a harsh voice. "That is, if you have really slept, which I very much doubt."

Simultaneously, and as the maid looked up with a startled air, rubbing her eyes and staring, there was a frightened little exclamation behind the curtains.

But Nordensterne hastened to call out a few reassuring words in his ordinary voice, and the occupant of the couch made a murmured reply, showing that, if still astonished, she was no longer frightened.

In the mean time, Greeta had started to her feet, with a look of mingled dismay and resentment which it was difficult to imagine as assumed.

"Were you asleep," demanded the detective, "or only shamming?"

"Shamming?" repeated the young woman. "Good God, sir! what has happened, and how and why are you here in this place?"

"Answer my question!"

"I am ashamed to say that I was asleep, sir, and so far faithless to my trust—if only mademoiselle will ever forgive me! But why should I be shamming such an outrageous fault? What can you mean?"

"No matter; you may discover later on. Run this instant and summon Doctor Dreamthorpe hither. Go at once, I say!"

She had paused, her dark cheeks reddening, her splendid eyes glooming at the all but brutal peremptoriness of his tone and manner, but then she quickly disappeared in obedience to the command.

"Miss Haworth!" spoke out the detective, gently, as soon as she was gone.

"What is it, Mr. Nordensterne?" came the response.

"I hope you will credit me with making this intrusion only with the most indispensable regard for your safety?"

"Certainly I do, Mr. Nordensterne."

"Have you partaken of this draught tonight?"

"Once only."

"How long since?"

"Nearly two hours, I should say. It was after my first sleep, which was brief and broken."

"Thank God for that!"

Here Dreamthorpe entered hastily, followed by Greeta.

From the fact of his being fully attired, though in his dressing-gown, it was evident that he also had lain down without disrobing.

"Doctor," exclaimed the detective, "it is your first duty to examine that night-potion. I have reason to believe that it has been freshly tampered with, though, Heaven be praised! not prior to Miss Haworth's first and last taste of it, as she is good enough to inform me."

The professor, who had come prepared for making the test, at once took up the glass without a word, and then produced a small vial, which seemed to contain a grayish-colored powder.

Then Nordensterne went on more collectedly: "I have been glamoured, spell-bound, doctor?" said he. "And, during my helplessness, I am certain that these apartments have been invaded through the disused passage by your patient's mysterious enemy, the veiled prisoner in black."

"But I was not willingly, not connivingly false to my guardianship, as I have reason to believe that girl to have been!" he pointed threateningly at Greeta, who regarded him bewilderedly, as if deeming him mad. "Beware of her! and if you are wise, you will yourself watch out the remainder of this night. As for me, I have duties at once elsewhere, the nature of which you may guess."

The professor looked at the girl somewhat incredulously, if sternly, but at the same time his countenance, notwithstanding that he strove to render it impassive, wore a generally displeased or surly expression.

It was easy to infer that, in spite of the explanations, he was secretly resentful at the detective's figuring in the situation.

"Go, Greeta!" he calmly commanded. "I will investigate this charge in the morning, and, if you are innocent, you shall be indemnified. Madame Tourette will make you comfortable elsewhere for the night."

There was an indistinct murmur, perhaps of protest, or at least of sympathy, from the interior of the couch.

But Greeta, after a single reproachful glance at Nordensterne, which heightened the effect of her dark comeliness not a little, burst into tears, and took herself off, without a word.

The detective felt half-remorseful. Had she really been there in his room with Maida and the arch-conspirator, or might he have only dreamed it? But there was the displacement of his bed, together with the unfastened door, as substantially against her. And moreover, he was naturally provoked over the cavalierly manner in which the doctor had received his accusation, and he now watched him in impatient silence.

The verdict was soon given.

Dreamthorpe first tasted the potion, frowned, and then threw into the glass a few particles of the powder, which instantly caused the contents to assume a greenish color, as with absinthe.

"It is true," he said, half reluctantly it would seem. "Mr. Nordensterne, you interposed opportunely; the draught had been again tampered with. I shall remain here."

There was another little exclamation from behind the hangings, but the detective turned abruptly, without a word, and quitted the apartments.

Re-entering his own room, and fastening the door shut behind him, he was instantly and forcibly impressed with a sense of danger and insecurity on his own account.

It wasn't as if any one had entered the apartment since he had quitted it.

On the contrary, all was externally as bright, warm and comfort-suggesting as before.

But there was something in the air—something terrible, something menacing, something occult—something as of an invisible and appallingly malignant presence—which might have chilled the blood in his veins but for his being thoroughly resolved and prepared.

He looked at his watch.

Twelve precisely, the mystic threshold of time against which he had been warned so repeatedly and earnestly by Dreamthorpe!

He looked to his pistols, drew on a close-fitting felt cap with which he had provided himself, took up and lighted a lantern, and, unlocking the door leading out into the haunted wing, boldly entered the corridor.

The door at its extremity he also unlocked and opened, and then stood for an instant, the lantern high above his head, gazing into the loft beyond.

CHAPTER XVI.

INTO THE THICK OF IT.

THIS loft of such terrible memories, into which Nordensterne now gazed so searchingly, was apparently bleak and deserted, without the slightest reminder of the juggling or supernatural horrors, whichever they might be, that he had experienced therein in Dr. Dreamthorpe's company.

It was intensely cold.

The windows were no longer close-shuttered from without, as in the former visit—it will be remembered that the entire wing had been thoroughly aired on the detective's insistence the previous day, though the windows themselves had subsequently been lowered.

But not a distant light was visible through the panes on either side, and the place seemed nearly, if not quite, as desolate, stuffy and uncanny as ever.

The storm roared around the wing, seemingly with something awed and muffled in the sound, the snow seemed to beat on the glass in a softer and more timid way than it might have done elsewhere, as if small wild animals were tapping against them for admission with their little cushioned paws, but were yet indeterminate whether it might not be preferable to trust to the pitilessness of the storm itself than such an

interior, while the cold seemed to penetrate the place to its inmost core.

However, Nordensterne was warmly clad, though not so muffled as to interfere with what ever activity of movement might be called for.

In addition to warm underwear, stout trowsers and shoes, together with the felt cap pulled down over his ears, he now wore a heavy short pea-jacket, close buttoned to the chin, in the spacious left pocket of which was thrust one of his revolvers, while up-peering out of its companion pocket on his right, in addition to the butt of his second revolver, was the stout handle of the telescopic cane or club, duly shortened, which had stood him good single-stick service in many a pinch against great odds.

On his necktie, just under the chin, reposed the modest-appearing breastpin of electric possibilities, with its concealed attachments complete.

In fact, he had forgotten nothing in preparing for the adventure that was doubtless before him.

The rubber suit borrowed of the coachman he had left in his room, not apprehending any outdoor work, at least for some time to come.

His preliminary examination of the loft lasted but a moment.

Then, somewhat surprised at the bleak naturalness of everything, so to speak, he suddenly recollects that the diablerie had not begun on the former occasion until his companion and he were fairly in the room, and the door had been blown shut behind them.

"I'll endeavor to knock out that part of the trick at the outset," he said to himself, a sudden notion striking him.

He stepped into the loft, cautiously keeping his brawny shoulders against the open door as he did so, and set down his lantern, which was a very good one, giving an exceptionally bright light, against the wall.

Then he seized the door with both hands, got a fair grip on it, and gave a great twisting wrench, with the intention of tearing it from its hinges.

In addition to his athletic nimbleness, Nordensterne was a man of prodigious muscular strength, such indeed as would have hardly been surmised by one of his supple and graceful build.

But now, to his astonishment, that particular door, though old and rickety of appearance, and seemingly but loosely hung upon its rusty hinges, remained as immovable to his utmost exertions as if fashioned of iron and hasped with steel.

He essayed again and again, until the veins stood out on his neck and the sweat poured down his forehead under the visor of his cap, but with no better success.

Then that low, melodiously terrible laugh, with which he was by this time so familiar, only this time it seemed more terrible, more diabolical and more menacing than ever before, and, moreover, with a new suggestion of personal vengefulness in its vibratory cadence, rippled out from the further extremity of the loft!

He instinctively started back a little further into the interior, to turn and confront it.

As he did so there was a sweeping blast from somewhere, the door being torn from his grasp and hurled shut, with an inconceivably hollow and desolate clash.

Nordensterne had snatched up his lantern and turned eagerly.

There she or it was, at the head of the narrow stair in the corner, as on the former occasion—black-robed, black-vailed, statuesque, commanding, imperious, terrible!

The detective laid his hand on a pistol, and was about to draw a bead on the creature and shoot, as a preliminary to rushing upon her, when he reflected that he had already made the trial in the house-grounds under equally favorable circumstances and without effect, and he desisted, for the moment, at least.

"Who and what are you?" he exclaimed, in his clear, steady voice.

A repetition of the laugh in response; that was all, though perhaps with a new and sinister mocking in its musical diabolism.

Nordensterne promptly set down his lantern again, drew and leveled his revolver, getting thoroughly his famous, unerring drop upon the figure, and advanced rapidly upon it.

But this time there was no mysterious retreat by sinking through the stair-opening.

With yet another scornful laugh, she stretched forth her white, corpse-like hand commandingly, repellently, apparently scattering something out of it.

That something at once seemed to take fire, filling the great room with a lurid, yellowish effulgence, that totally obliterated the clearer light of the lantern, which had burned down as if on the point of extinction.

And this not as though simply dimmed by a more lustrous illumination, for the lurid glare was not so bright as stifling and unnatural—a sort of marsh glare or charnel gleam, as one might say, in which objects were not only hideously enlarged and distorted, but rendered unreal and indistinct.

Simultaneously with this manifestation, the bold detective stood rooted to the floor, his pistol going off harmlessly with a muffled sound in

mid-air, his short hair bristling under his cap, in spite of himself.

Then, as on the previous occasion, he reeled back against the closed door, extending his hand, palm outward, before him, with a horrified, exorcising gesture.

The blood-smell, with its mysterious accompaniment of mental and emotional consternation, was upon him once more with an intensity in comparison with which its theretofore manifestation was feeble and innocuous.

It was like an invisible but smothering, fetid mist, simply inconceivably suffocating, dismaying, paralyzing, in its suggestiveness of reeking murder and fiendish agency no less than in its physical prostration.

However, he was not quite blinded—could still see dimly amid the luridness, and, covering his mouth and nostrils with one hand, he at last was capable of shaking off the spell and recalling his strong faculties in a measure.

Then, with what seemed to be a farewell laugh from the demoness, there was something of an abatement of the paralyzing smell, and he was conscious that she had sunk out of sight.

Could it be that he had encountered and finished with the worst of it, as in his former experience?

With a great breath of semi-relief, Nordensterne again started forward.

As he did so, however, even the eerie luridness disappeared, and, as he again paused, a great, almost absolute darkness settled down over everything, but faintly relieved by the low, stifled flame of his lantern, burning dimly in a sort of ringed, circumscribed isolation of its own where he had left it.

At the same instant some object fell with a dull, sickening thud near his feet in the center of the floor, and the blood-smell once more deepened into frightful intensity.

Still, he gropingly advanced another step or two, when his foot struck against the object.

It had a soft, yielding touch, which somehow, and quite unaccountably, was an additional inspiration to his sense of loathing and horror.

Nevertheless, he felt down, and, taking hold of the object—which he could dimly make out as something rounded, of about the size of a regulation foot-ball—by what seemed to be a soft hairlike covering of considerable abundance, he bore it into the limited arc of the lantern.

A single searching glance was sufficient to cause him to fling it from him with an uncontrollable cry of abhorrence.

It was a human head—the head of a comely and youthful woman—apparently freshly severed from the body!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROWNING HORROR.

NORDENSTERNE was destined to be yet more woefully disappointed in the hope that he had experienced the worst and last of the deviltry or sorcery of the haunted wing, whichever it might be.

Scarcely had he thrown the head from him before there was a rushing, clamoring sound below, like the trampling feet of a riotous and invading multitude.

Then the air cleared, and the lantern beam'd forth unconstrainedly with its wonted and natural brightness.

But, tramp, tramp, tramp! Scuffle, scuffle, scuffle! hurry, hurry, hurry! the mob were coming up the last stair.

Grasping a revolver with one hand, his redoubtable stick with the other, but somewhat again oppressed with an odd, overpowering sense of helplessness, rather than fear, the detective found himself again shrinking, backing up, against the closed and immovable door, in spite of his dreamily cursing himself for pusillanimity in doing so.

Then, suddenly thinking that he might as well have all the light available on what threatened to ensue, he touched the concealed wire, turning on the full power of his electric broach.

Instantly he was clothed with the travesty of the sunshine, the great loft being lighted up to its uttermost cranny as bright as noonday.

But at the same moment, an indiscriminate mob of masked men, with the black-robed woman as the leader and ruling spirit of the appalling high-jinks, as it might be characterized, came pouring up the stair in tumultuous and savage sport.

The loft was half filled with them.

Paying no more attention to the spell-bound detective than if he was non-existent, they set up discordant cries and began to kick about the head like a football, while leaping and dancing frantically like fiends possessed.

It was inconceivably atrocious, this mad, demoniac sport with the poor decapitated, once comely head.

It was sent bounding over the floor, splashing against the walls, up to the lofty-peaked roof itself (for this part of the wing was not ceiled in,) over the heads of the yelling, exultant crew, and sometimes flying from foot to foot, being long kept in the air by successive timely and opportune kicks.

It became bloody and shapeless, the long black

hair, once doubtless the hapless owner's ornament and pride, quickly becoming loosened from the flash, and occasionally streaming out meteor-like in its enforced flight, but not for an instant did the satyr-like crew seemed disposed to let up in their inhuman pastime.

The veiled woman alone did not actually participate therein, but, after a few graceful caperings, merely glided quietly about on the outskirts of the mob, much as she had done in the case of the detective's ruffianly assailants in the Park, and seemingly extracting a silent and undemonstrative enjoyment from the pure hideousness of the scene.

And presently she alone came to regard the presence of the light-emitting and light-clothed spectator as an actual existence.

True, it was only by an occasional malevolent glance through her floating veil, but she seemed to fairly exult in the spell of horror that pinned him there to the door, incapable of speech and motion, as much as to say:

"Ah, but after all this will you venture to intermeddle with my little private affairs again? I think not, my fine fellow, I think not!"

One reflection, however, gradually gave the detective courage amid all this horrible helplessness.

This was a conviction that, whatever the veiled demoness herself might be, the masked ruffians in this appalling spectacle were not phantoms, but real men, howsoever infatuated, brutalized and inhuman.

Then it finally came upon him, with a sort of interior shock, that he recognized, or partly recognized, one of them.

"Koffsky, by the Lord," he exclaimed to himself. "It can be he, and none other."

He managed to follow the particular masker's individual movements for some moments amid the tumult.

Then his hands instinctively grasped stick and revolver once more, and he made a final effort to shake off the spell that was upon him, preparatory to a devastating, hurricane swoop in among the infernal crew.

Had he succeeded in the initiative, he would not have hesitated to make the attempt, desperate as it would have been, and notwithstanding that they numbered a score or more.

He would have trusted confidently enough in taking them by surprise, in his own prowess, which he could not but know to be exceptional, and in the overmastering indignation, no less than horror, with which the awful scene inspired him.

But alas! he was powerless to do more than to merely grasp his weapons.

He did, however, inadvertently, in making this much of an effort, detach the power from his electric breastpin, so that the great white light of his own making suddenly vanished, leaving nothing but the comparatively weak beams of the lantern to illuminate the spectacle.

He did not take the trouble to revive it, and the mad, inhuman exhibition went on in the dimmer light, even with wilder fury and more demoniac tumult, if that were possible.

How long this sort of thing lasted Nordensterne never knew, or could never thoroughly comprehend.

He seemed to be the frozen, statue-like center of a species of devils' dance, or enchantment, which at last became a positive aching physical, no less than mental, pain.

At last, however, the gory foot-ball disappeared with a final kick down by the head of the stair.

The mob followed it, pell-mell, helter-skelter, with the veiled woman floating on their rear.

The next moment, save for the detective himself, the loft was entirely deserted, the utmost silence prevailed everywhere, as if the scene had never been save as a figment of his disordered brain, and could it be possible? yes, yonder, through one of the eastern, or front windows, and through the eddying whirl of the still down falling snow, there was the faint dusky blush in the sky as the forerunner of a new day.

Nordensterne, now suddenly relieved of the spell, and with not even a suspicion of the blood-smell remaining, could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

But a consultation of his watch, as a first step out of the mystification, showed him that it was hard on to five o'clock.

Five o'clock, when he had made his first entrance into that realm of horrors, real or imaginary, at the indication of the midnight hour!

But he couldn't believe that it was imaginary, or that his brain could have been so disordered as to give birth to such a phantasmagoria.

No, not even when he seized the lantern, as his next move, and made a hurried examination of the loft, to find no ruddy or spashing sign or trace of the gory head on floor, wall or rafters, where he had seen it so frequently rebound and strike in the course of the ghastly pastime.

He couldn't and wouldn't believe in it as a mere cheating illusion of his senses, even then.

And hark! he bent his ear and listened.

More, though less incautious, noises from below, accompanied by a harsh, creaking sound, as of the opening of a far-away door from difficult fastenings and upon rusty hinges.

An hallucination? Not so!

And then the thought flashed upon him like a revelation:

The deep-set door in the river-fronting wall of the cellar masonry!

This was succeeded by yet another, to this effect: Stains or no stains, traces or no traces, the maskers were real. They are the veiled woman's followers, and are now escaping under her direction by the tunnel exit from the cellar front!

To formulate this much was to act on the instant, with all the bulldog instinct in Nordensterne's daring nature once more wholly in the descendant.

His club in one hand, the lantern in the other, he darted to the stair.

Descending it with headlong rapidity, but almost without a sound, he flew along the corridor of the ground floor toward the cellar stair.

Perhaps some one, or more than one, drew back into one of the communicating rooms to let him pass, but that was no difference.

Lights were gleaming, voices murmuring in the depths, and down he tore along the tottering steps in little less than a single bound.

Too late!

The door which had seemed so immovable was open, and a last form was disappearing within.

But as he rushed forward, relinquishing his cudgel to grasp a pistol and send a shot in pursuit, it closed in his face with a clang.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE BLIZZARD'S TEETH.

ENRAGED, Nordensterne threw himself against the door, but in vain.

It seemed as immovable, as disused and ancient, as in the former instance.

He might as well have hurled himself against the solid, rough, time-stained masonry in which it was framed, as if built in and sealed there.

But all was not lost.

Though the cellar was now apparently empty, or tenantless, save for his own presence, he at this moment detected some stealthy movements overhead.

Then he remembered the forms that had seemed to shrink back from him in his headlong descent.

He was up the steps and into the corridor again with a series of bounds, his right hand clinched and empty, but ready to clutch the most needful weapon at his command with the flashing, lightning-like movement for which he was distinguished.

The door of one of the chambers on the west side was open.

He sprung into the room with a fierce shout, flashing the lantern over his head in advance.

Several men had doubtless already succeeded in escaping by the open window, as their guarded voices could be heard outside in the floundering snow below.

A last man was half-way through the window, momentarily stuck fast in that posture, it would seem, by reason of his shortness and corpulence.

It was Koffsky, or the masker whom the detective had imagined as he.

Such luck! for with Salome's rascally and not a little mysterious stepfather, if it were indeed he, as a captive, what keynote to the entire diablerie might not be in the detective's possession?

He sprung forward exultantly, and the next instant had seized the plethoric fugitive by the posteriors—"by the bosom of the pants," in the "bouncing" vocabulary of the Bowery—in his iron grasp.

The fellow roared, kicking and lashing back, like a stray porpoise in the jaws of a harbor dredger.

But all would have been to no purpose, had not the detective suddenly felt pressed against the back of his neck a certain cold, metallic touch of instantly recognizable deadliness to any man accustomed to scenes of violence and crime.

At the same time, the vibrating, melodiously terrible, never-to-be-forgotten voice hissed in his ear the words:

"Give over, or I will kill you, spite of my promise to the contrary!"

Instinctively releasing his clutch on the man, Nordensterne turned to find himself confronted by the veiled unknown, grasping a small revolver that was leveled upon him with an immovable hand.

As he turned, however, she retreated, or floated back a step or two, at the same time throwing something in his face with her disengaged hand.

The detective was thereby rendered momentarily powerless once more, with a smothering, stifling sensation, together with something more than a mere suggestion of the hideous blood-smell so often alluded to as such a potent factor in all this witchery.

When he recovered she was gone, and the fat man had succeeded in wriggling his way through the window.

However, there was a rustling movement somewhere in the direction of the cellar steps, and he darted again below, lantern in hand.

It was only to perceive the apparently immovable door once more close with a clash, doubtless after the fugitive figure of the woman in black herself.

Again he held up his lantern, and viewed the mysterious door with amazement, testing it with his powerful hand.

How could it thus be made to work at the will of the veiled unknown?

There was no latch or knob, and, as remarked before, the great rust-eaten keyhole still bore no indication of having been touched for years, while it seemed as solidly and immovably placed as the stone and mortar that inclosed it.

But there was no time for a further examination now.

Hurriedly retracing his steps, the detective peered out of the window above through which the fugitives, with the fat man at their tail-end, had made their escape.

The early morning was still very dark, and the snow continued to fall furiously, the freezing gale to sweep with undiminished energy.

It was evidently such a blizzard as even he had scarcely surmised in his prediction—such a one, in fact, as had been only known on the Middle Atlantic Coast, thus far by common report from the prairie and mountain regions of the great and wonder-producing Northwest.

But the snow itself made a certain pallid light by reflection.

And for some distance out on the deep-blanketed surface he could distinguish a furrowed track, made by the fugitives.

It led straight off and slopingly downward in the direction of the river, apparently following the line of the subterranean passage leading out from the cellar-wall.

Nordensterne congratulated himself on his vague foresight in securing the rubber garments from the coachman.

His determination was instantly made to follow up the mystery even in the blizzard's teeth.

To return to his room and invest himself in the rubber boots and coat was the work of but a few minutes.

Then he could not but pause a moment, and look around the cozy apartment (the gaslight still blazing merrily, the cheerful grate-fire yet glowing warmly), somewhat wonderingly before taking up the conclusion of his adventure.

Could it be that five hours had elapsed since he had last quitted this agreeable and inviting room for the horrors through which he had passed? for the weird necromancy, or what not, that had so glamoured the time, no less than his own personality?

It seemed more than incredible. He momentarily surveyed himself in the mirror of his old-fashioned mahogany bureau, half-wondering that his hair and mustache had not turned white.

But there were no such indications, though he presented an odd enough figure in his close-fitting cap and novel rubber casings.

"Humph!" he muttered, grimly; "I look like a professional burglar in distress, or might suggest a sort of cross between a Union Square cabman and a Lower Bay barge-man. I am afraid that if Salome—or I should say Miss Haworth—could happen to see me just now—" It seemed more than incredible. He momentarily surveyed himself in the mirror of his old-fashioned mahogany bureau, half-wondering that his hair and mustache had not turned white.

But he broke off abruptly, and hurriedly retraced his course, after a glance at one of the front windows showing him that the early dawn light was brightening slowly but perceptibly.

Again reaching the open window of the room below the loft, it occurred to him to leave his lantern behind as unnecessary.

Then, after drawing on a pair of substantial woolen mittens, which he fortunately found in the spacious pockets of the rubber coat, he unhesitatingly climbed out of the window, and leaped down.

The distance was not great, and he was at once thigh-deep in a drift that had formed against the base-line of the wing.

But he could track with his eyes in the dim light and amid the mistiness of the falling flakes, the furrow that had been made by the fugitives, though it was more than half-filled up already, after a lapse of not more than twenty minutes.

Then he at once set out, calmly and methodically, to follow it, bracing his powerful frame for the sustained effort before him, and wading more than knee-deep in the snow after getting out of the drift.

That enterprise was destined to prove the weather event of the detective's career, and it was little wonder that later on he should find added to his list of personal characterizations the significant surname of the Blizzard Detective.

CHAPTER XIX.

KNEE-DEEP AND NECK-DEEP.

IT is laborious and wearing work, toiling on through pathless snow of but a few inches deep as ever one must know who has had the experience.

But there was nowhere in the course that Nordensterne was slowly plowing out himself that the snow was less than two feet in depth, while the average must have been half again as great on the level, with many an intervening drift that was up to his waist, so that locomotion, when possible at all, was literally more of a plowing or ramming than even of a wading process.

The Drop Detective.

To add to this, the fierce wind was bitterly, searchingly cold, while the flakes continued to whirl down and the surface powder to blow off for the most part in all but blinding clouds.

The only redeeming feature was in the fact that the fallen snow packed but slowly and was of a light and powdery nature, by reason of the exceptional cold that accompanied it, which made the forcing of a passage more practicable than would otherwise have been the case. And even this rather negative palliation was counteracted in a measure by the very fineness and impalpability of the snow itself, which one could not avoid breathing into the lungs more or less, with painful consequences akin to suffocation.

However, the fugitives themselves had doubtless made their way to the river-bank, thought the detective, when pausing now and then to recover breath, and the pursuit must therefore be possible.

He hoped to come finally upon their rendezvous, and thus locate it with a view to either present action, or energetic measures in the future.

But how to get back to the Sanitarium, after once reaching the river-bank, was a problem that he hadn't as yet thought of, or didn't care to trouble his head about.

Finally, after reaching the brow of the lawn, the dawn light having increased considerably, while there seemed to be some abatement in the snow that was in the air, the detective paused for a somewhat longer breathing space than he had yet indulged in.

It then occurred to him to look about him, and take in his general bearings so far as was practicable.

It was a strangely arctic and desolate scene for the month of March that he managed to survey by glimpses.

The long edifice of the Sanitarium seemed to be half buried away in drift, the snow in some places being heaped and pyramided higher than the roof of the porch sheltering the kitchen entrance.

The river was wild—a vast turbid flood, bearing on its wintry bosom, where not wholly congealed and fielded over in its numerous little sheltered creeks and bays, jagged and crush-heaped ice-rafts, thick-mantled with the fallen snow, and occasionally acres in extent, far as the aching sight could penetrate through the mist-wreaths of the storm-whirled flakes.

Elsewhere, lawn, hill, hollow and housetop, a dim wilderness of white, a realm of desolation, coming out slowly and frigidly in the hesitating, reluctant glimmering of the clouded dawn.

For a long time there had not been heard a rumble, a whistle or a steam-puff from the adjacent tracks of the Hudson River Railroad, along the water's edge, usually so indicative of speeding traffic night and day, showing that business had thereon been temporarily suspended a long while since.

Having regained his wind and strength, Nordensterne again pushed on, with the snow more than above his knees.

They were high-topped boots that he wore, however, while the rubber coat was likewise a great protection, though at the same time something of an incumbrance.

"If I were only a snow-plow," he more than once thought to himself, "or even a steam-tug on wheels, with my own will and pluck as the motor!"

Then, beginning the descent of the lawn-slope, his footing failed him for an instant, and he was brought up standing quite up to his neck in an unsuspected drift.

Only temporarily discouraged, however, he could still, by looking down the hill over the snow surface, follow the line of his course, though now—for it was once more snowing with undiminished vigor—it was but a dimly-discerned, slightly-depressed trough running in a somewhat zigzag direction down toward the river.

Then he pressed on, or forged, slowly ahead.

But the gale had been, as it was still, dead from the northwest by west, and the drift seemed to extend, more or less, over the whole face of the slope.

While it occasionally shoaled, so to speak, as he advanced laboriously in the descent, so as to be no more than up to his waist, it would quite as often be neck-deep again, causing him to come as frequently to a temporary stand-still, and seriously consider whether it might not be labor saved to drop on all-fours, and endeavor to tunnel or burrow his way onward.

Indeed, he might have actually essayed the attempt, but for the uncertainty of his being then able to pursue his course; so that he still continued toiling and fighting his way as before.

As a matter of course, the possession of a snow-shovel, or some similar implement, would have vastly facilitated his task, but this was one of the requirements of his equipment that had unfortunately not occurred to him.

While thus laboriously engaged, Nordensterne more than once fell to wondering how the maskers, who had effected their over-ground escape, had managed successfully when similarly beset and obstructed; for he was not so self-effacing as not to know himself as an exceptionally powerful and hardy man.

He finally came to the conclusion that it must

have been chiefly because of their familiarity with the course in view, though he was presently to be somewhat enlightened on this point in a manner altogether unexpected.

At last, much to his general encouragement, he rose so high out of the drifts as to catch a glimpse of something often seen before, but, strangely enough, never connected in his mind till now with the main object of his arduous enterprise.

This was an old roofed barge, or house-boat, lying hemmed in by the ice close to the river's bank, and far on beyond the snow-buried levels of the railroad line.

Both Miss Haworth and he had remarked it in their terrace-strolls back of the Sanitarium, but had been told by Hannibal that the structure was in a sinking condition, and long since abandoned.

But on a nearer view, the boat appeared to stand well and stanchly up amid its frozen environments, and it struck the detective as more than probable that it was the secret headquarters, or rendezvous, of the mysterious woman in black and her subordinate hauntings of the north wing.

Soon after making this observation, Nordensterne's foot caught on something under the snow, which caused him to trip and fall forward on his face.

When he regained his footing, it was with the object that had caused his upset in his mitten hand.

A smile of satisfaction crossed his wearied face.

It was a railroad laborer's shovel, which had doubtless been carelessly left on the hillside before the storm, and had as yet seen but little service.

Inasmuch as Nordensterne, a moment later, stepped into the deepest drift he had yet encountered, fairly overtopping his head, and bidding fair to extend all but interminably, he at once proceeded to put the "find" to good and effective use.

He now made comparatively rapid work, partly tunneling and partly excavating his way as the requirements of the case demanded.

Suddenly, however, as a stroke of the implement caused a powdery miniature avalanche in upon him from a little to one side of his course, he came to a staring confrontation of an unexpected and pitiable object.

It was the corpse of a man frozen to death, standing stark and stiff, bolt upright in the overwhelming drift.

CHAPTER XX.

SECRETS OF THE BLIZZARD.

A BRIEF examination on the part of the astonished detective revealed the fact that the man was hopelessly frozen.

It was equally evident that the victim was one of the fugitives by the ground floor window of the north wing, whose dimly outlined track Nordensterne was so persistently shaping his course by.

A gaunt man of middle age, poorly and insufficiently clad, with a dark, sinister and forbidding face—perhaps that of an Italian, Bohemian or Hungarian—which the detective was quite certain he had never seen before, and with something sticking out of one of the pockets of his ragged overcoat that proved to be a coarse black half-mask, such as the mad crew of head-kickers had worn while engaged in their inhuman pastime in the haunted loft.

Only regretful of the man's death because of the valuable secret information that had perished with him, Nordensterne promptly pressed on through the snow, leaving the corpse stiff, stark and staring out of its dead eyes, upright in the drift just as he had found it.

But the unknown tatterdemalion was only one of the secrets of that memorable blizzard which the adventurous detective was destined to come upon, and it was only one of a thousand or more that were left in its devastating path when its vast snow-blanket was melted away from over the wide extent of country upon which it had so unexpectedly descended with the hush of eiderdown and yet with the remorselessness of doom.

Scarcely a dozen paces on from the frozen remains, the detective picked up something from under his feet.

It was a canvas sack, snow-crusted and cold-stiffened, looking as if it might have escaped from the unfortunate's grasp just before he had succumbed to the frost-drowses from which there is no awakening, and containing something hard and round.

This Nordensterne found, to his horror, upon further examination, to be nothing less than the battered woman's head that had been made a football of!

But wait! The head and face were apparently frozen stiff and solid, but the latter, on being more critically inspected, though streaked and splashed with red stains, presumably of blood, had resumed its original corpse-like comeliness, so to speak, and showed neither bruise nor abrasion from the innumerable kicks it had received.

The hair, moreover, though still matted and

disheveled, did not seem to adhere naturally to the skull, but rather as if plastered or glued there by the scalp, perhaps artificially.

What could it mean.

The head had become very heavy from being frozen.

Again, while the detective was still handling it curiously, a piece of the bloodless flesh, at the ragged edge of the neck where it seemed to have been severed from the trunk, broke off in his hand.

"Come now!" thought Nordensterne; "this is something for our scientific and erudite professor to investigate."

He thrust the broken piece into his rubber coat pocket, and then, notwithstanding its unpleasantness and the inconvenience it might cause him, he returned the frozen head to its sack, intending to retain it in his possession until he should be able to lay it before Dr. Dreamthorpe in the latter's laboratory.

But man proposes and God disposes.

Resuming his course, he had hardly taken a dozen steps more in advance before his footing gave way.

He sought to recover himself, but in vain.

The next instant he went sprawling down hill in the snow, the sack flying off in one direction, his precious shovel in another.

He had stepped down an abrupt little declivity, with this unfortunate result.

Quickly floundering to an erect position again, however, and none the worse for his tumble, the detective presently managed to recover the shovel, but the missing head defied his most indefatigable search for it; and time was more or less precious to him, for it was by this time broad day.

He at last reluctantly relinquished the search, and continued on his course.

Then another and more gratifying discovery was made known to him.

His fall had precipitated him a considerable distance, and he now found that, though still in the great drift, which was deeper than ever for that matter, he was quite at the bottom of the slope, and in the side-cut directly alongside the snow-buried railroad tracks.

This he discovered by climbing and taking a lookout from the fork of an apple-tree, whose trunk he had blundered against—for the drift in the cut was considerably higher than his head, while the tree-top was well above the surface.

From his temporary perch he could look directly across the white waste to the house-boat, about an eighth of a mile away, and to the mighty river beyond, wild and brimming with its acres and hummocks of running ice.

But, better than this, he was now enabled to recover his course with some certainty.

He now perceived that it led northward along the cut before crossing the railroad, the point at which it turned off being marked by the chimney of a small house or cabin just peeping up out of the surface of the drift.

Full of renewed hope and not a few fresh speculations, the detective jumped down into the snow, and straightway began to ply his shovel energetically in tunneling his level course toward the cabin.

He presently reached its door, and breaking away the snow-arch over his head for the purpose of obtaining more light, found that it was securely fastened.

Nor did his most vigorous pounding upon the door avail of eliciting any response from within.

While thus engaged, he heard a sound that was something between a groan and a snore from somewhere in the drift and close at hand.

A brief investigation brought to light an unconscious man seated despairingly under the snow while leaning against the front of the shanty, into which he had evidently tried in vain to obtain admission before being overcome by the treacherous frost-drowses, and fast freezing to death.

A glance at this unfortunate caused Nordensterne's heart to leap joyfully, notwithstanding the menacing precariousness of his own position, which had been unpleasantly forcing itself upon him, little by little, for a considerable length of time.

It was Koffsky.

"Here!" cried the detective, seizing the fellow and shaking him roughly. "You are too important to me to be turned into a human icicle out here in the snow. Wake up! I want you!"

Koffsky was pretty far gone, however, and it was only after rolling him over and over like a hogshead, and rubbing his face and hands with snow for some moments, that he gave indications of a return to animation.

Fortunately, he was very warmly clothed, or he might have been wholly beyond aid.

As he lifted his head and sleepily opened his eyes at last, however, begging to be let alone and allowed to resume the treacherous somnolence that he had found so dreamily comfortable, the detective resorted to a final measure that speedily touched the spot as you might say.

Producing from one of his inside pockets a large flask of brandy, with which he had luckily had the foresight to provide himself, he unstoppered it, and applied the muzzle to the fat man's murmuring lips.

That Koffsky liked his dram was at once evident.

After the first preliminary sniff, his mouth firmly glued to the flask, he quickly managed to seize it affectionately with both hands, back went his head, there was a gurgling sound, and he would doubtless have continued to ingurgitate until the flask was dry had not his rescuer permanently interfered.

"You've had enough!" said the detective, slipping the flask out of sight, "and you are almost yourself again. Get up!"

Mr. Koffsky obeyed, though with some difficulty, shaking himself, smacking his lips and rubbing his eyes.

It was quite obvious that he failed to recognize his rescuer in the rubber suit and rough cap that disguised him.

CHAPTER XXI.

KOFFSKY.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the resuscitated man.

Nordensterne, who was by this time busily engaged on the cabin door with a professional pick-lock, answered, without taking the trouble to look around:

"Your rescuer. Isn't that enough?"

"Yes," the other went on, slowly; "I suppose so, if you object to telling me your name. Mine is Kuhlmann."

"Ah, it is, eh?" still working at the lock. "A good-sounding name, at all events."

Mr. Koffsky somehow didn't seem to think it necessary to express any gratitude, or perhaps he was absent-minded in that respect—it is a very common failing where gratitude is concerned.

"You'll never be able to open that door," he said, with a stupid look. "I hammered on it for dear life before swooning away. It'll defy all your efforts."

"Indeed?" And, having unloosened the fastenings, Nordensterne demonstratively opened the door, and entered the cabin.

Koffsky promptly followed him, doubtless greatly surprised, but with a certain air of familiarity with the premises.

A wood fire was smoldering on the hearth, as indeed had been promised by a line of smoke ascending from the chimney-top, and this, together with its dense-packed sheathing of snow, rendered the interior, consisting of one great apartment, gratefully warm and comfortable, though somewhat dark.

From a pile at one side of the hearth, the detective abruptly threw some fagots and larger wood on the fire, which briskly blazed up with cheering brightness.

Then he took in the significance of his surroundings with a swift, expert glance and increased satisfaction.

They were rude enough, but substantial.

A large table at one side was covered with cold meats, bread, other coarse viands, plates, bottles, glasses—the ample remains of a rough collation at which doubtless numerous feasters had snatched some sort of a meal but very recently, and upon which the fat man had at once alighted with the avidity of a night-hawk upon a June bug, and was now industriously gorging and guzzling as if it were his last free lunch on earth, with the knock-off trumpet ready to toot.

There were numerous benches and stools, many lanterns, together with some rude weapons or implements, such as short crowbars, bludgeons and sheath-knives, hung round upon the rough board walls.

But two small windows were visible, substantially grated with iron on the inside.

The rear wall, however, was of solid rock, formed by the perpendicularly escarp'd face of the hill against and partly into which the cabin was built.

In the center of this was a small, deeply-set door, provided with a keyhole, but no knob or latch, which a test on the part of the detective proved to be immovably closed.

No wonder that Nordensterne was gratified.

The shanty was evidently the hood, or covered outlet of the subterranean passage from the cellar of the Sanitarium's "haunted" north wing.

The fugitive crew last making use of it had, quite as evidently in the detective's mind, only lingered long enough for a bite or two, and then hurried away, doubtless for what they regarded as the securer refuge of the house-boat, though, in that case, he could not understand why they had not left some traces of their passage through the snow-drift at the entrance.

Though hungry and somewhat faint himself, Nordensterne quietly waited with his back to the fire until Koffsky gave indications of being thoroughly gorged.

Finally, when the latter turned round, with a very red face and his eyes half-popping out of his head, seemingly stuffed to the throat with cold meat, beer and whisky, he asked with bland politeness:

"Are you sure you have had quite enough, Mr. Koffsky?"

The mention of his real name caused the fat man to stare.

"Whom are you addressing, my friend?" he demanded.

"Whom but yourself, my dear Koffsky."

"But, I told you my name was Kuhlmann."

"Ah, a name, a name! what is a name? Perhaps you can guess what mine is, though you haven't yet asked it?"

At the same time the detective threw off his great rubber coat, which had become oppressive before this, and took off his cap.

"Jehovah of the humans!" cried the other, starting back; "Peter the Great's satrap—or I should say the inspector's detective, Nordensterne!"

"That is better, Koffsky. No melodrama, if you please. So you are one of the mysterious woman's football-players, eh?"

"God of the universe!" Koffsky threw up his hands amazedly. "What can you mean, my friend?"

"Just what I say. Answer my question!"

"What! on compulsion?" Koffsky's favorite hysterical manner was upon him—in fact, he was by this time something like himself again. "Good God! am I your slave because you have done me a kind turn? Ow! Are we in the torture dungeon of the Czar of Russia, or before the Star Chamber of Bismarck's holy inquisition. Jehovah of the Universe! am I a man or a helot, a gentleman or—"

"Oh, shut up!"

But there was no need of the naturally disgusted injunction.

The Hungarian had interrupted himself.

The next instant, with his face puffy and red as a boiled lobster, he had reeled into a sitting posture on one of the benches, where he sat propped against the wall, staring with half-shut eyes, his breath coming and going in wheezing respiratory gasps.

Nordensterne at once sprung to his assistance, tearing open his collar, and then relieving him of his overcoat.

At this the man was evidently relieved of the apoplectic attack with which he had been threatened.

Still his eyes were abnormally heavy—and no wonder, considering the reaction from his recent half-frozen condition, the warmth of the cabin, and what he had eaten and drank on top of the great pull at the brandy flask.

"One more drink, my friend!" he murmured, stretching forth his hand.

The detective hesitated, studying him keenly, and then gave him what he craved from the adjoining table.

Then Koffsky incontinently toppled over at full length on a pile of old clothes, that were in the corner near which he had been sitting, and stretched out his chunky frame and fat legs with a sleepy sigh.

"Look you, friend," he managed to murmur, "you shouldn't be here. They will kill you—make cats' meat of you—she will order your death as coolly as—as—"

He was then buried in a sleep that bade fair to endure for hours.

"I rather think you'll do," commented Nordensterne, with much quiet satisfaction.

He accordingly lost no time in satisfying his own appetite at the table, washing down what he ate with some excellent Milwaukee beer that was at hand.

Having thus refreshed himself, he resumed his rubber coat, and prepared generally for a fresh battle with the snow.

He quitted the shanty, closing the door securely after him, quite satisfied that nothing would be disturbed during his absence.

Then, attacking the snow with great vigor, he began digging and tunneling his way straight out toward the railroad line.

Presently, much to his joy, he broke through a packed wall and stepped right into a snow-tunnel already and but recently excavated.

"I am again in luck!" exclaimed Nordensterne to himself.

And he looked around him critically before taking instant advantage of his discovery.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HOUSE-BOAT.

THE situation speedily explained itself.

Hastily and expeditiously constructed, doubtless by many and zealous workers, the snow tunnel, after being begun from the shanty door had been filled in back and closely packed against the house by the first installments of the excavated material, the rest being disposed of in niches or chambers at intervals beaten and pounded into rather than scooped out of the sides of the passage.

The drifts were so deep as to leave an arched roof doubtless of several feet in thickness on an average, but so thin in places as to cause the daylight to filter through sufficiently to afford a dim light in the interior.

The tunneling, though jagged at the sides and overhead, as though executed with the utmost precipitation, evinced no little crude engineering direction.

It was of fairly regular width, and seemed to reach out straight and true for the river-bank as if marked out by a preliminary scientific survey.

But why this precipitation, after the escape from the cellar of the north wing had been effected and shut off behind, unless an organized

pursuit by the underground passage had been feared?

Nordensterne gave this speculation but an instant's attention, however, after which he struck out at a rapid, swinging pace through the snow tunnel, shovel on shoulder, weapons in readiness.

At last he reached the line of the railroad.

Here he paused for a moment, suddenly alarmed and mystified by an unaccountable noise.

It was a great, though muffled, puffing, wheezing, snorting sound, accompanied by a sort of booming thud, or shock, repeated again and again, which caused the tunnel walls and roof to tremble.

Then he smiled as the explanation of the mystery occurred to him, and he instantly darted across the tracks into the semi-darkness beyond.

None too soon.

Hardly had he cleared the tracks when the noise increased to a hissing, thunderous volume, and then, with a shower of snow to either side and the sudden intrusion of the daylight, a great railroad snow-plow, impelled by three locomotives, burst with a rush and a roar through the tunnel lines at right-angles.

There the hissing and jointed monster paused midway for an instant, and then slowly backed for a space to gather fresh impetus for yet another forward rush.

"No time must be lost," thought Nordensterne. "In an hour or so the cut will doubtless be filled with laborers clearing away the tracks, and Doctor Dreamthorp surely can't wish all the world and his wife to be let into the secret of his Sanitarium mystery."

The snow-tunnel had only been severed in half for the width of one of the tracks, without seriously demolishing its continuation.

Nordensterne again pushed forward, perceiving a visible brightening of the dimness somewhere ahead.

It proved to be caused by a natural break in the passage through a shoaling of the drift at a fence line, at the edge of which was a tall ash tree, and into which the storm was hurling its undiminished burden of flakes and surface snow with an energy that promised to speedily fill up the cavity or trough.

The snow-bank rose at either hand to the height of eight feet or more.

Nordensterne consulted his watch.

Nine o'clock! and doubtless fully an hour, or since his last lookout observation from the fork of the apple tree, since he had looked over the level of the drift.

He now climbed to the top rail of the fence for the purpose of refreshing his enlightenment.

The house-boat, fairly piled over with snow, and looking very forlorn and deserted, was still many rods away on a line with the tunnel, which seemed, however, to be broken off, or end abruptly, within a few rods of the ice-packed river edge.

Once more taking up his course through the passage, where the temperature was agreeably warm after the bitterly freezing air of the opening, he pushed on uninterruptedly for a considerable distance.

Then there was another brightening ahead, doubtless indicative of the end of the tunnel, and he was quite sure that he heard the murmur of voices.

Another moment's advance, and there was no doubt of it.

Proceeding much more cautiously, he presently came within view of the open space by the river, where two men were pacing up and down before the mouth of the passage, on guard, and evidently little enough in love with their freezing task.

Nordensterne lingered back to one side amid the gloom of the snow-cavern's mouth, and listened.

Both men by their accent appeared to be foreigners, and were roughly though warmly fortified against the weather, with top-boots, stout great-coats, huge mittens, and fur caps drawn down over head and ears.

"Curse it all!" growled one, stamping up and down on the snow, and shaking himself in the biting wind to be freed of the accumulation of flakes on his person; "where's the sense of our being forced to stand guard in this devil's storm, any way, Oscar?"

The other laughed satirically, while beating and flapping his arms about his body.

"The sense of it, Jutemann," he replied, "is in this, that it is our Mistress's will. So, best grin and bear it."

"You are like the rest of 'em in that—blind obedience and never a growl! But I, for one, am growing tired of this sort of capriciousness. Midnight football at one hour, guarding a snow-hole at another, with but little plunder coming in, now that river and railroad are both frozen up, and with our comrades either snugly sleeping off their fatigue or having a jolly time with the whisky in the water-house yonder. I am sick of it!"

"So am I, but it would not do to let the Mistress suspect it. Besides, how much better off are we than poor Kuhlmann and Rentz, doubtless long since frozen stiff back up yonder somewhere under the snow, according to the one

fellow who did manage to make the above-ground trip to the river!"

"Still, the Mistress may be long absent down in the city, and—"

Here there was a heavy fall of snow from the inner roof of the cavern, caused by an impatient movement on the part of the listening detective, on being thus informed of the mysterious woman's absence from the house-boat, for the chief object of his heroic and arduous undertaking was to discover something more definite of her individuality.

"Run in, Oscar, and see what that means!" cried the first speaker. "If the tunnel is falling to pieces, we must summon out the entire band for repairing it. Such were the Mistress's orders."

The other complied, though somewhat grumbly, and disappeared from his comrade's view into the passage.

Nordensterne had stepped alittle further back into the obscurity, in order to obtain plenty of swing for his right arm.

As the fellow peered first up at the roof and then down at the fallen mass, he fetched him a silent but tremendous fist-blows under the ear that at once stretched him out senseless, without so much as a groan.

He then drew the unconscious form to one side, and waited.

It was only for a minute or two, when the other sentry began calling into the cave after his comrade.

Receiving no answer, he also advanced, but only to meet with a similar fate.

Satisfied that both victims were stunned beyond the probability of their reviving, unaided, within the course of an hour or so at least, the detective covered them well up with snow, as a further protection against their freezing—though the temperature of the snow-tunnel was in itself comparatively agreeable, for that matter—and then, leaving his shovel behind, he stepped boldly out into the open air.

There was no sign of any lookout on the house-boat, and he at once approached it over the intervening snow and ice, though not a little at loss as yet to know how it was to be entered.

However, after reaching and skirting the bow-end of the craft, he came upon a certain gangway leading up on deck from the outer, or river side.

Here, also, was a newly-cut passage stretching into the river through the ice, with indications of a small boat having recently passed out through it, which might explain the manner of "the Mistress's" seeking the lower part of the city, in accordance with what the detective had overheard, perilous as such a course would be by reason of the storm and the running ice.

The gangway likewise seemed to have been recently in use, though now nearly level over with snow again.

It led up over the bulk's side, and across the bow-deck to the door of a sort of companion-way let into the bulkhead of the raised portion of the deck, all drearily mantled by the deep-fallen snow.

Nordensterne noiselessly boarded the hulk at this point, and approached the door.

There were indistinct murmurs from within, as if from voices far away toward the stern.

Finding the door unfastened, he entered, closing it behind him.

He was in a low deck-compartment, containing coils of rope, chains, oars, boat-hooks and similar equipments stowed with some orderliness around the sides.

At his feet was a broad covered hatch, while just beyond was another bulkhead, with a door in it, on the thither side of which the voices sounded somewhat more plainly, but not so distinctly as to come from an immediately adjoining second compartment.

"One might as well make a beginning just here," said the detective to himself.

He accordingly drew off the hatch-cover, and, after a peer down into the gloom, entered the hold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A ROBBERS' RETREAT.

AFTER descending the ladder, Nordensterne was in pitch darkness.

But he lost no time in lighting up the hold with a blaze of white luster by a touch of the wire communicating with his electric breastpin, and looking around him.

A single glance was sufficient to determine the character of the old hulk's hold.

It was the store-house of a robber band—the entire boat being neither more nor less than their secret retreat.

The hold was fairly stacked and stuffed with multifarious goods, that were obviously the proceeds of numerous and systematized plunderings on stream and shore, but doubtless chiefly from railroad freight trains.

A narrow passage had been left between the stacked-up cases, boxes and barrels from stem to stern.

Threading this, the detective came upon a pile of kegs at the further or stern extremity.

They were kegs of gunpowder.

"Good!" thought he, as he heard the tramping of feet overhead, as of men engaged in

a break down. "How nicely a slow-match, cleverly applied here, would blow the entire miscreant gang into kingdom come!"

But he was investigating, rather than blowing up, mysteries just at this time.

A brief examination of some of the surrounding plunder showed that the greater part of it was in all probability very valuable.

Some of the larger cases, samples of which had been broken open, contained silks and velvets, there were packages of spices and costly foreign dyes, while scarcely any part of the stored loot seemed to include any ordinary or cheap merchandise.

"How could the scoundrels have succeeded in tumbling these things out of freight trains or ships' holds?" thought Nordensterne. "And how have they managed to remain unsuspected in this den, doubtless for many a month? But most likely their women-leader is exceptionally cunning, while the general impression of this hulk being an abandoned wreck would help them out not a little."

Retracing his steps, he extinguished his novel headlight and ascended the ladder, covering up the hatch after him.

The voices continuing aft, blended with whistling, tramping and other sounds of merriment, he cautiously proceeded to the second bulkhead door, and entered the adjoining compartment.

It was almost pitch-dark and very close-smelling, but the sounds were now plainly distinguishable as proceeding from the next compartment aft, streaks of light from which were just apparent under the edges of a closed door, together with sundry cracks and crevices, in the division wall.

Making his way with extreme caution, the detective approached the latter, when, in spite of his circumspection, he stumbled over some obstruction, and went sprawling on his face with a great hubbub.

He had just time to crawl off behind some projection to one side, when the door was burst open, letting in a stream of light, and three or four men rushed out, while as many crowded peering after them from the opening.

"Come back!" called out one of the latter. "It was nothing but those infernal rats. Hark! you can hear them now scampering, helter-skelter, through the hold."

But the others looked suspiciously along the floor in the line of light and elsewhere around them, though fortunately without making any systematic search.

"Come back, can't you?" cried another of the onlookers. "It's your turn, with big Pedro as a partner, Jim. No mortal spy would be able to board us by land or water in this cursed storm."

"I don't suppose he could," growled one of outsiders. "But it mightn't prevent the Mistress herself from stealing another march on our high-jinks, as she did once before."

This seemed to stagger them all for a moment, as a fresh indication of the fear in which their terrible monitress seemed to be regarded by her ruffianly crew.

But one of the others quickly replied, with a derisive laugh:

"What fools you are to suppose such a misfortune! It isn't three hours since she started for our Palisades fastness, with the big Swedes at the oars, and they were to return after leaving her there. Come back, and don't act like such cowards!" with an oath at the finish.

This injunction was at length obeyed, and the detective, whom nothing had escaped from his chance place of concealment behind a huge cask, was again left in darkness, and with such additional information as had come to his understanding.

Moreover, he had now obtained a complete knowledge of his new quarters, and a moment or two later was posted at a convenient knot-hole in the bulkhead, whence a complete view of the adjoining interior was afforded him.

There were eighteen or twenty ruffians in the place altogether.

It was a large after-cabin, with a galley fire, upon which some pots were boiling merrily, with a savory smell, at the further end, and fairly lighted by several lamps stuck in brackets here and there.

A number of men were sleeping around the sides, but the merriment had been resumed, and the majority were gathered about a huge mullatto, who was whistling vigorously, as an accompaniment for two rough chaps who were executing a breakdown in the middle of the deck, where space had been cleared by dragging a long deal table to one side.

The scene somewhat forcibly reminded Nordensterne of a similar one that he had once viewed in a winter gathering of Canadian and half-breed trappers amid the wilds of Manitoba; but with the difference that the participants in the present orgy were for the most part of a more multifarious and decidedly brutal aspect.

He remained on watch, while listening to their talk for some moments, when the whistler suddenly ceased, holding up his hand warningly.

"Lay low!" he called out, in a hoarse, deep whisper. "I hear the splash of oars."

Then, as an abrupt bush fell in consequence, he darted across the deck to a deadlight, cautiously opening it and peering out.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "the Swedes are back again, and madame along with them. It must be that they couldn't make the crossing. Hurry up and get everything in order."

While this was being done, the detective also bethought himself of getting out of his scrape, inasmuch as he now felt quite certain that he would be murdered instantly should his presence be discovered.

Rapidly and noiselessly retracing his course through the compartments, he was once more in the gangway of the bow-deck, with the heaped-up snow at either side of it.

Hurrying along the path on all-fours, he dropped over the side upon the ice, and succeeded in concealing himself, unperceived, under the outer gang-plank, just as the boat was making its way in through the open reach.

It seemed to have been terribly battered in its battle with the running ice.

The stately veiled and fur-clad female figure in the stern sheets, no less than the brawny fellows at the oars, was covered with snow and frozen spray.

However, she stepped confidently and easily ashore without assistance when the landing was made, and, at a muttered command, one of the men hurriedly followed her on board, while the other remained behind to make all snug with the boat.

The latter was apparently a Scandinavian, a man of slow movements but herculean proportions, and with a countenance which the detective thought as about the most ferocious and pitilessly brutal he had ever seen.

A few moments after the woman and her attendant had disappeared, the fellow, in stepping from the boat to the ice, perceived the crouching detective.

His flat, savage face flamed up.

Then, with no other utterance than a sort of snort, he aimed a sweeping blow at the spy with an oar, and, this being evaded, he at once drew a murderous knife and sprung upon him like a mad boar.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BACK TRACK.

BUT the detective had glided to his feet, shedding his rubber coat as he did so, with the sinuous activity of serpent.

His very life, even if he should escape this particular ruffian's murderous intentions, was at stake; and as fortunately for him, the ruffian had as yet made no outcry, it was equally indispensable that no further opportunity should be accorded him.

Instantly, therefore, Nordensterne was upon his defense, his own poniard glistening in his grasp as if by magic, and his every fighting qualification alertly, mercilessly to the fore.

The down-sweep of the Swede's murderous lunge was evaded as cleverly as the blow of the oar-blade that had preceded it.

Then the detective was suddenly swarming at him, so to speak, on every side at once, as if he were several assailants in one.

There was a last scuffle, the giant, slipped on the ice, and the next minute he was hurled headlong into the free water, without a groan, and with Nordensterne's lightning-like knife thrust hilt-deep in his heart.

Shrinking back under the hulk, to make sure that the noise of the plunge would not attract attention from within, the detective silently watched the huge body until it was sucked down by the current far away under the surface of the ice.

Then he silently washed off his dagger, slipped it back into his bosom, and resuming his discarded top-coat, stood a moment reflecting.

While the temptation to continue the investigation of the hulk was very great, the imminent peril attending it would now be vastly augmented; and he had, moreover, already secured an unexpected fund of information which could be followed up later on at leisure.

Besides this, even Nordensterne's iron frame began to give signs of weakening under the prolonged and incessant strain to which it had been subjected, his disappearance would long ere this have caused great anxiety at the Sanitarium, and there was yet before him the uninviting prospect of the return thither through the floundering snow.

He therefore, after due reflection, took up the back track.

Fortunately for him, the snow continued to come down in whirling and blinding flurries, which effectually masked his retreat over the ice and open ground to the snow-tunnel's entrance from such of the robbers as might be on the lookout.

He found the two sentries whom he had "slugged" still unconscious, though breathing peacefully under the warm snow-blanketing to which he had treated them, and with apparently a fair prospect of presently recovering their senses with but vague notions as to how they had lost them.

So, he accordingly once more shouldered his shovel, and began to retrace his way through the tunnel.

Crossing the break at the railroad line, he could hear above and below the voices of the laborers, doubtless already employed in swarms in clearing off the tracks.

Then he succeeded in reaching the door of the buried hillside shanty in short order.

Koffsky was just beginning to rouse up out of a snoring nap when he entered.

Paying but little attention to him just then, Nordensterne once more inspected the door leading into the bosom of the hill, the forcing of which would doubtless so simplify and facilitate his return to the Sanitarium by the underground route.

He had tried to pick the lock before, without success, so he now attacked the barrier vigorously and systematically with the largest crowbar that he could select from among the implements available.

"I say, Mr. Detective Bureau!" called out Koffsky, slowly assuming a sitting posture in his corner, while Nordensterne was thus unsuccessfully engaged.

"What is it?" The detective paused for breath, and turned angrily toward him.

"God of the Humans, sir! don't look at me as if you wished to bite my head off and swallow me whole."

"No danger of that with a maw short of a coal-pit, Mr. Koffsky."

"I have a proposition, sir."

"What is it?"

"I am very thirsty, you see."

"Likely enough."

"Give me another pull at that brandy-flask of yours—but as long a pull as I like, mind you—and I'll tell you a little secret concerning that mysterious door, that will most likely save you a heap of unnecessary sweat and trouble."

"There's beer left on the table yonder."

"I don't want beer; it's brandy I want."

"You've had enough. Besides, I shall speedily put your activity to use—such as you may possess."

"All right; then my secret remains untold."

Nordensterne reflected, and then passed him the flask, which he glued his lips to, like a syphon tube, until there wasn't a drop left in it.

"Koffsky," remarked the detective, tossing aside the flask on its being returned to him, "you are altogether quite a cheerful sort of hog. Now what is your secret with regard to this door?"

Koffsky had unexpectedly got upon his feet with no little spryness, as though both sobered and refreshed.

"The secret, Mr. Central Office," replied the fat man, wiping his lips, with a leer, "the secret is this, that you may hammer and pound on till doomsday, but you'll never get it open without the unduplicated master-key, which is in the Mistress's possession."

"I could have guessed that much before!" cried Nordensterne, flinging down the crowbar in a rage. "Is that all you have to tell me?"

"Jehovah of the Cosmos! is it not enough?" was the response. "Hasn't my secret saved you a heap of sweat and trouble, as I promised, besides—"

He was cut short by a cuff on the ear that sent him reeling and roaring across the cabin, with his hands to his head.

"Murder! assassination!" bellowed the Hungarian. "Is it in Siberia or Kamtschatka that we are? Am I at the mercy of Joan the Terrible, Caligula the Horrible, or the Holy Mormon Inquisition?"

"Be quiet, you rascal!" Nordensterne led him by the ear to one of the benches and plumped him down upon it with a bang that elicited another outcry; "or perhaps you'll be made to think you're in a hotter place than at the bed-rock of this blizzard. There! remain where you are till I am ready to make some use of you."

Nordensterne then made a last despairing examination of the mysterious door, but with no better result.

Whatever the real secret of its stubbornness, it seemed to be backed against the solid hill itself—as implacable as adamant.

But no more time was to be lost. The dreaded return route through the blizzard's depths and in the blizzard's teeth was inevitable.

The detective deliberately prepared for the struggle, by resuming his top-coat, and ordered Koffsky to do likewise.

The latter somewhat alarmingly obeyed—having doubtless already made up his mind that Nordensterne was about the last man in the world he would ever essay another practical joke upon—after which his captor fairly drove him before him out of the cabin and then through the snow-tunnel to the left, and on the back-track up-hill.

But, after puffing and blowing progressively for a space, the fat man ventured to stop, turn round and clasp his hands.

"Jehovah of the Humans, Mr. Detective Bureau!" he exclaimed, in real consternation; "it can't be that you are taking me with you to Doctor Dreamthorpe's Sanitarium?"

"It is. Go on!"

"To that poisoner's castle-hall?" screamed the Hungarian. "God's footstool! if you knew how he dislikes me!"

"Doubtless with good reason. Go on!"

"But even my step-daughter, my dear sir, has but little reason to admire me, and—"

"Go on!"

And, helping him forward with a vigorous shove, the toilsome ascent was resumed.

It was, of course, ten times more arduous when they had passed the lookout apple-tree, with the already nearly filled-in trough path, instead of the cleared and arched tunnel-route before them, and the freezing storm whirling its witch-dance of flakes around their heads.

Suddenly, however, Koffsky stopped again, recoiling with a terrified exclamation.

CHAPTER XXV.

GREETA AGAIN.

THE Hungarian had abruptly come face to face with the corpse of the frozen man.

It was still where the detective had left it, propped up against the snow-bank to one side of the path, the head pyramided, or steeple-crowned, with white, but the form comparatively free by the caprice of the gale, marble-faced and staring into vacancy with its half-closed, frozen-lidded eyes—a realistic monument of the blizzard's devastating sweep.

"It is only the frozen body of one of your companion fugitives," observed the detective, indifferently. "Go on!"

"Poor Carpi!" exclaimed Koffsky, but with no sympathy whatever in his voice, having speedily recovered his nerve. "But then he was only an Italian."

"You knew him well?"

"Did I? Bless you! a Calabrian, that would have sooner knifed you for a hasty word than eat his dinner for a gratuity."

"Go on!"

"But really, Mr. Central Office," still puffing, "I am quite out of breath. Besides, as you must have perceived, my legs are so thick and short, my adipose so pronounced—"

"Go on!" accompanied by a fresh shove that sent him toiling anew up the snow-buried steep. "Here!" the detective placed the shovel in his hands, "when I order it, you can stop and clear out the path a little. You will find it an agreeable relief in the monotony of this undertaking."

"Relief? Oh, good Lord!"

"Proceed!"

The ascent was resumed, the Hungarian continuing to wheeze and blow like a stuck snow-plow, but for all that kept mercilessly at his work by his stern taskmaster.

At last, however, after reaching the brow of the steep lawn, and with the Sanitarium plainly in view, but a short distance away, amid the flurries of the storm, an exceptionally stubborn drift, which had altogether obliterated and leveled over the original path, brought them both upstanding, master no less than man.

Nordensterne, by reason of his prolonged exertions previously, and the Hungarian, because of his plethora and shortness of breath, were alike fairly stalled within sight of their destination, and with perhaps something of a chance of freezing without help being summoned and obtained.

And what made the situation yet more aggravating, just a little beyond this last drift, which they found themselves unable to surmount or attack, there was a broad, comparatively cleared path, doubtless but recently shoveled out by Hannibal and Johann, reaching directly up to the kitchen doors.

It was a somewhat humiliating thing to do after the hard-won success up to this point, but there was no help for it, so Nordensterne lifted up his strong voice, and shouted for help.

But the storm shrieked as loudly, if not louder, and it was only after repeated exhaustive efforts that any show of life appeared along the line of the building in response.

Then a graceful cloaked and hooded female figure appeared from out of the kitchen porch, and came running down the path to meet them.

Leaving Koffsky where he stood, panting and blowing, waist deep in the drift, the detective, by a last great effort, fought his way on to the extremity of the cleared path where, however, he paused momentarily, trembling and unstrung.

The graceful figure proved to belong to Greeta Muller, which was somewhat awkward for Nordensterne in view of the circumstances attendant upon their last meeting, or rather separation.

However, she did not seem to treasure any resentment, though an odd look passed between her and Koffsky which escaped the detective's attention, ordinarily so alert and lynx-like.

"Is it you, Mr. Nordensterne?" cried the girl, with unaffected satisfaction. "How glad everyone will be! You can't imagine the alarm there has been. Shall I help you and—and that gentleman—up the path?"

This was not a little magnanimous on Greeta's part, Nordensterne was bound to confess to himself.

"No, thank you kindly, Greeta," he replied, slowly getting back something of his nerve and strength. "Where are Johann and Hannibal?"

"They are clearing a new path to the road-gate; it might take some time for me to summon them."

She shivered, drawing her wrap yet closer around her shapely shoulders, but none the less

eying him sympathetically from the depths of her hood.

"Doctor Dreamthorpe, and Alphonse?" he queried further.

"The doctor is with Salome, who seems to have had another bad turn about—well, not from her ailment, but about something or other. As for old Tourette, I don't know where he may be hopping around. You see, Mr. Nordensterne, we're regularly snow-bound, and with scant supplies, I believe, while it is doubtful if the butcher's or grocer's wagon can reach us for days. You are still trembling, sir. Better try to come right on with me."

"You are of a very forgiving disposition, Greeta."

"Not always, Mr. Nordensterne," she bit her lip, a look of something like reproachfulness coming into her comely face; "only sometimes, and—and with certain persons."

The detective turned and looked at Koffsky, who still remained stuck in the drift, the picture of complete exhaustion and distress.

"God of the Humans! hurry up and get me some assistance, Mr. Detective Bureau," he whined, in the most ludicrous piteousness. "I melt, I thaw, I congeal. Ow!"

Nordensterne looked to perceive Greeta burst into a laugh, but she remained unaccountably grave, which he accepted in his credulity as a fresh evidence of her sympathetic goodness of heart.

"I find that I can now reach the Sanitarium alone," said the detective. "But that man is my prisoner, Greeta—a valuable one at that—and I fear that he is shamming."

"Shamming?" yelled the Hungarian, raising his pudgy clinched hands to Heaven, and then smiting his perspiring brow. "Jehovah of the Humans! you hear him. Ow!"

Greeta did laugh a little this time, though only a very little.

"Well, Mr. Nordensterne?" she asked.

"I am going to place confidence in you, and also ask a favor."

"I wish you would always treat me so fairly, Mr. Nordensterne."

"Well, I shall try to."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stand guard over that man," he placed a cocked revolver in her hands as he spoke, "while I obtain help to lug him along up to the house—should it prove that he is really not shamming, you know."

There was another "Ow!" from the fat man, which was unheeded.

"I shall do as you wish, Mr. Nordensterne."

The young woman grasped the weapon resolutely, and cast a stern look at the snow-bogged culprit.

"Shoot him down, without mercy," was the detective's parting injunction, "rather than let him escape."

He then hastened up to the house, slowly and painfully at first, but more energetically, his iron frame swiftly recuperating, as he proceeded.

Madame Tourette was asleep in an easy-chair by the range, with a vinous suggestiveness of pose and breathing, while some one, doubtless her husband, and perhaps in the worst of humors, could be heard stirring noisily among the bottles and casks of the wine-cellars underneath.

But, luckily, both Johann and Hannibal were entering at the front door, breathless and perspiring from their hard work in the snow, as Nordensterne advanced to meet them from the rear hall.

But even then he was momentarily interrupted.

"Oh, Mr. Nordensterne!" exclaimed a cold and even, but somehow excited voice; "back to us again? Thank Heaven!" And the white hand of Maida Berlioz, who had softly put in a colorless appearance from the adjoining butlery, was laid on his arm.

"Thanks, Maida!" coldly, and shaking off her touch with a look that caused her to shrink back, or retire herself, as you might say; "but I have no time for passing civilities, real or pretended, just now."

Then the two men came hurrying to him, in answer to his call, their faces, but the negro's especially, lighted up with honest congratulation, for the detective was well liked by both.

"Come with me, my men!" the latter hastened to say, leading the way back. "I have a prisoner down the lawn yonder, and you must help him up to the house."

But at that instant there was a shot from the brow of the lawn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRESH COMPLICATIONS.

THEY ran down the cleared path to where Greeta stood at her post, the revolver still smoking in her hand.

But Koffsky?

He was no longer there.

But a glance below revealed the pudginess of his vanishing figure, rolled up like a huge ball, and bounding and whirling away down the slope with tremendous rapidity, gathering to himself layers and plasters of snow as he rolled until he

seemed like a monstrous, shapeless flying white mass, his head sticking out at one side, his heels at the other.

In another moment he had bounded over the edge of the first steep declivity, and disappeared in a whirling mist of snow-spray.

"After him!" roared Nordensterne, in a fury of rage, and both his assistants sprung breathlessly in pursuit. "He must be recaptured, if possible—it is of immense importance!"

Then he turned to the young woman with a terrible look.

"Is it an escape?" he demanded, striving bravely to keep his anger and disappointment within bounds.

She had hung her head, and mechanically permitted him to relieve her of the weapon.

"Yes, sir," was the faltered reply. "I—I am afraid so."

"You fired at him and missed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Purposely?"

"Yes."

He gritted his teeth to keep back any further words, which he felt sure he might afterward regret as addressed to a woman.

Then, the pursuers at that moment reappearing over the top of the declivity, with a despondent gesture indicative of non-success, he turned abruptly and strode back toward the house.

But the young woman followed him pantingly, her bosom aheave, her dark eyes both moist and glowing.

"Sir! Mr. Nordensterne!" she called after him pleadingly.

He abruptly faced her again, with a face as hard as iron.

"Oh, for God's sake!" she cried, passionately; "don't look at me like that."

"You shouldn't have accepted a trust, to betray it, even if you had reason to believe that I treated you harshly or unjustly last night."

Her lip quivered.

"It wasn't that!" she replied, half-doggedly. "I wouldn't harm or betray you, no matter how you might treat me."

"Indeed!" sarcastically.

"Mr. Nordensterne, I simply couldn't shoot at that man to kill him!"

"He is an infernal scoundrel—the confederate of bandits and perhaps murderers!"

"That may all be. But I couldn't do it."

"Why?"

She flushed, lowering her eyes once more.

"Mr. Nordensterne!"

"Well, Greeta?"

"That man is—my father!"

Thrown off his guard as he was by this astonishingly unexpected statement, there was a genuineness in her voice and manner that there was no questioning.

"Does Miss Haworth or Dr. Dreamthorpe suspect this?" he demanded, after a pause in which to collect himself.

"Oh, no; you may be sure of that."

He regarded her more gently than he had, perhaps, ever done before.

"I'll keep your secret," he said, "at least for the present."

Her eyes were sufficiently expressive of her gratitude, as he turned and hurried on.

The coachman and footman overtook him, to say that the spherical fugitive had only ceased rolling at the bottom of the long slope, after which he had somehow got on his legs and disappeared amid the whirling snow out in the direction of the river, when they had given up the pursuit from sheer exhaustion.

As Nordensterne re-entered the house, Dr. Dreamthorpe himself, already apprised of his return, hurried through the main hall to meet him and press his hand.

"This terrible storm—we had almost given you up for lost!" he exclaimed, a little feverishly Nordensterne thought. "You can imagine how anxious we are to hear your story. But then you are doubtless completely worn out."

"That is the truth and no mistake, my dear professor," replied the detective, discarding his cap, rubber coat and boots just where he stood, and slipping on a grateful pair of slippers which Hannibal had unbidden hastened to bring for him. "I am done up teetotally for the present, if ever mortal man was."

"Everything is ordered. Your warm bath is in readiness, and—but will you occupy the same room?"

"None other." The two were now on their way up-stairs together. "Miss Haworth is again not so well, I am sorry to hear?"

Dreamthorpe coughed behind his hand, and there was a noticeable change in his voice, which was still feverish though, as he answered:

"Nonsense! want of sleep, that is all, for she rested but badly after your revelations. We shall impatiently wait for what you have to tell us, but you must take your time."

They then separated, the professor entering his laboratory, and Nordensterne continuing on further back in the direction of the bathroom.

When the latter was in the act of entering that apartment, there once more fell Maida Berlioz's calm touch on his arm, and there she was before him again, having slipped out of the adjoining dormitory, and, strange to say, without

a trace of the rebuff to which she had been so recently subjected.

He had turned angrily toward the girl, when something in her face checked his tongue, and then she hastened to anticipate him.

"Don't believe a word of his congratulations, and all that, Mr. Nordensterne," she said.

"What do you mean, Maida?"

"Mademoiselle Salome has not been put out, or made nervous, afresh by broken rest, or anything of the sort."

"By what, then?"

She smiled strangely, but not disingenuously.

"By her fretting anxiety over what might have chanced to you, sir, and," with her dry little laugh, "Doctor Dreamthorpe is frightfully jealous, conceal it as he may."

"Nonsense! Is that all you have to say?"

She would doubtless have colored up resentfully had her dead bloneness, so to speak, admitted of it, but contented herself with compressing her thin lips and flinging him a spiteful look out of her hard, bright eyes.

"Isn't that enough, I should like to know?"

"Well," sarcastically, "I thank you for your good intentions, at all events, Miss Berlioz."

And he dismissed her with a grave bow, entering the bath-room, and unceremoniously securing the door behind him.

It was now about one o'clock in the day.

Twenty minutes later he was snugly in bed, with a sense of prospective rest such as he had seldom, if ever, known before.

The room had been agreeably aired and rewarmed, a splendid fire sparkling in the grate, and his couch retaining its changed position, which was directly across the door leading to Miss Haworth's apartments.

Before he quite lost consciousness, he noticed with much satisfaction that the door directly opposite, the loft-door, had been additionally secured by a broad, solid wooden bar passing directly across its center, and closely fitting in square-shaped iron hooks at either side of the frame.

As is often the case with extreme physical fatigue, Nordensterne's recuperative rest was ushered in by a short and rather fitful preliminary nap.

Awaking from this, he was surprised and not a little amused to see Johann, the stolid German coachman, gravely occupying a seat before the opposite door, in which he sat as stiff and upright as a Prussian grenadier, with a remarkably-looking firearm of some sort between his knees.

"Hallo!" cried the detective; "it is you, Johann?"

A grave nod was the response, without a change in the expressionless wooden face.

"What are you doing here?"

"Mynheer, it still snows terrible," replied Johann, with phlegmatic irrelevance, and in his quaint broken English. "City and country already buried. Beats anything va't efer I see in Brussia, even in Pommerania. Business suspends, traffic paralyzes, peoples lost in the streets, eferyt'ing queer."

"Too bad! But that isn't telling me why you are there on guard."

"Horses in stables eat their heads off. Carriages all cleaned, harness too. No work for Johann till snow stops. Then plenty more shovel-work. Now nothing to do."

"Ab! so you posted yourself on guard duty over my slumber? Is it by the doctor's orders, or your own volition?"

"This musket, mynheer," solemnly coming to a present-arms with the firefirm alluded to, which was of immense length, a flint-lock of prodigious antiquity, besides being fearfully and wonderfully made, "was with my grandfader at Waterloo. His grandfader had him in der Dirty Years' War. It nefer misses fire. It is grammed mit puckshot and zlugs."

"Quite formidable, no doubt. But this is real kind of you, Johann; especially if you are undertaking it of your own option."

"I loaf a friendt, mynheer, petter dan I fear der ghosts and vantoms. Ditto mit mein zide-bartner, Hannibal, der pig negro. V'en I vatch a v'ilie, he reliefs mit me."

Then Nordensterne closed his eyes and slept the sleep of the just and the outworn—a solid, dreamless, invigorating and uninterrupted stretch for hours.

When he once more awoke, Hannibal was on guard in the German's place.

"It is eight o'clock, sir," said the black. "The doctor has kept dinner waiting for you, if you would like to go down to it."

"That's me!" cried the detective, springing out of bed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TALKING IT OVER.

DINNER was an especially agreeable event to the detective on this occasion, by reason of the additional presence of Miss Haworth.

It was for the first time since Nordensterne's sojourn at the Sanitarium, and was now contrary to the professor's advice, while between him and his fair patient there was a just perceptible coolness, perhaps in consequence, or was it the less pardonable reason on his part that Maida Berlioz had more than hinted at?

At all events, while Salome was particularly animated, and the detective could not avoid the flattering consciousness that his safe return might have something to do with her high spirits, the latter was extremely circumspect in disingaging whatever complacency he secretly felt.

Indeed, he purposely, if not a little markedly, devoted the most of his conversation to his host, lest the reverse might be indirectly of unpleasant consequences to the young lady.

Salome did not seem to mind it in the least, however, or perhaps she understood the situation appreciatively.

She chatted gayly, was at her best appearance, which is equivalent to saying that she was simply and inexpressibly lovely; and, though Nordensterne's adventures were but remotely touched upon in the butler's presence, it was easy to see that their recital was awaited with the liveliest anticipations.

Only once did the detective himself allude to them during the repast, and that was but inferentially on the occasion of Greeta putting in a momentary appearance in order to bring her young mistress her vinaigrette.

"Though I was myself chiefly instrumental in casting suspicion on your maid, Miss Haworth," he observed, in a low voice, "I am glad to see her restored in your confidence, since it must have been with good reason."

"Yes," interposed the professor, before Salome could more than nod and smile in response, "we put her through a rigid examination this morning, which she underwent very creditably. But you shall be told about it presently. Pray drink a glass of wine with me, Mr. Nordensterne, and Salome will be glad to join us, I am sure."

"Won't I, though?" cried the young lady, as the glasses touched each other.

"Alphonse," said Doctor Dreamthorpe, ceremoniously, "we appear to be ready for the dessert."

Nordensterne wore an air of diffidence when they were gathered in the laboratory a little later; for, though there were elegant drawing rooms on the ground floor, Salome's end of this apartment had come to be the *post-prandial* resort by custom.

"Go on, Mr. Nordensterne!" cried Salome, when in her favorite seat, signing Greeta, who was in attendance, to retire, which the latter forthwith did, perhaps to lurk listeningly in the adjoining corridor, though the detective cared nothing for this. "We are ready, and, what is more, we are very impatient. At least, I can answer for myself, whether Papa Dreamthorpe is equally eager or not."

The professor smiled a little fitfully, and said nothing.

"But that is just it, Miss Haworth," observed the detective.

"What is just it, Mr. Nordensterne?" naively. "Or what is the it that the something just is?"

Nordensterne laughed, but only to become serious again at once.

"I don't know as you ought to bear my story at all, Miss Haworth—or at least all of it."

"Ab, perhaps merely in judicious selections, I suppose, like carefully weighed or expurgated fragments from the naughtier of the inspired poets?"

"Well, yes, then, though of course not in the same sense."

"Indeed! then in what sense am I not to bear the story of your last night's and to-day's experiences in the unabridged form, Mr. Nordensterne?"

"Parts of it are altogether too horrible," he replied, very seriously once more. "That's just the long and short of it, miss."

"I have never had an aversion to narrative of the hair-raising description—when certain of their veracity, as I would certainly be in this case," sweetly.

"Still," hesitatingly, "if your sleep is customarily apt to be broken!"

"So much the better. I would have something to occupy my mind with when unable to sleep."

"It will never do, Salome!" interposed the physician, with unusual peremptoriness. "So pray think no more about it."

"Indeed!" the rich sea-shell pink came dancing into her perfect complexion, with also a suggestion of temper in the brightening of the blue-gray eyes. "Well, Papa Dreamthorpe, then all I have to say is that Mr. Nordensterne will not tell his story in this apartment to-night. For," energetically, "here I intend to remain until I hear it, if our blizzard's second sun rises on an uncommenced tale!"

"Oh, pshaw, Salome!"

"Yes, yes; but I mean just as I say, Papa Dreamthorpe."

"Don't keep that—that everlasting nonsense up, Salome!" cried the professor, apparently stung at last beyond all endurance. "I hate it!"

"Keep what nonsense up?" calmly, now that he was the reverse, but with a somewhat supercilious elevation of the brows. "I surely have no wish to do or say anything that you hate, but if you will kindly signify what nonsense you refer to, Papa Dream—"

"There you go again!" peevishly still, but

now with a conciliating attempt to half-laugh it off. "Well, well, why should I be such a fool as to care, preposterous as it is?"

"Oh!" comprehendingly at last, and then with the airy rippling little laugh whose care-dispelling melody and artlessness there was absolutely no notwithstanding. "However, my dear Pap—I mean my dear cousin, where is the preposterousness of it?"

"Let be, let be! and pray forgive my ridiculous exhibition of temper, Salome."

"As you are ready to forgive mine?" archly. "But I'll leave it to Mr. Nordensterne if there was any inconsistency or preposterousness in it."

The detective tried to look preoccupied, while feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

"Let be, let be!" repeated the professor, half-pleadingly, passing his thin hand flutteringly over his intellectual head, as was his occasional wont. "All irrelevant, this, very irrelevant!"

But her caprice had not yet quite exhausted itself.

"Put you commenced it Pap—Cousin Paracelsus—and how will that do for a change?" she persisted. "And I really don't see anything at all unbecoming in my heretofore form of addressing you, apart from the real affectionateness of it," with a shorter laugh, "which you really ought to be proud of, it seems to me. Naturally, you know, you are amply old enough to be my father, while, if what is claimed for your elixir of life be true, why then, dear me! how old must you be cousin?"

"I had better tell my story at once, and without reservation," broke in the detective, whereat Salome clapped her hands and the doctor himself looked positively grateful. "I shall therefore divide it into parts, and begin with the beginning, after which you can explain away for me if possible Greeta Muller's and Maida Berlioz's parts, or seeming parts, therein, which led to my summary accusation of Greeta last night."

"What!" exclaimed Salome, while Dreamthorpe also looked up surprised; "Madame Tourette's niece, too?"

"Yes; but you will soon understand."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEAT AND CHAFF.

NORDENSTERNE accordingly related his first experience of the night before with the woman in black, in which the voices of both Greeta and Maida had seemed to bear such a realistic and sinister part.

Needless to say that he was listened to by both his auditors (to take no account of the probable eavesdropper behind Miss Haworth's *portiere*) with the most absorbing interest.

"What," presently asked Dreamthorpe, when he had concluded the episode, "is your own impression now, Nordensterne?"

"What it was at the outset," was the prompt reply.

"That these young women were really in your room, as the confederates of this mysterious creature's jugglery?"

"Yes."

Salome was merely knitting her pretty brows meditatively.

"Then," continued the doctor, slowly, "you deem it possible that their voices could have been an hallucination of the trance or spell into which you were thrown?"

"I don't see how it could have been, any more than the presence of the veiled woman herself, her throwing the powder into the fire that helped to overpower me, and all the rest of it. True, I did not see either of the girls, but it may have been simply because they kept out of my restricted range of vision, while I did see the veiled woman as unquestionably and distinctly as I now see you. This spellbound me bodily, hand and foot, bone and sinew, while at the same time enforcing my vision to a sort of narrowing concentration of the faculty—I can think of no better way to describe it—but no more. My mind remained unaffected for the time being—absolutely unclouded and vigorous. Therein was the torture, the mental anguish of my helplessness."

"Ah!" The professor folded his arms, slightly shaking his head.

"Moreover," continued the detective, "the woman's menace with the uplifted knife was as vividly real as anything conceivable. Besides, witness this," he bared his wrist, as he had once done before in the course of his consecutive narrative. "Hallucinations do not wound and draw blood and leave scars."

"True; but—" Dr. Dreamthorpe merely finished his unexpressed doubt with a continued shake of the head.

"Oh, buts are plentiful, as a matter of course to a non-participant. Perhaps you even doubt if my room was entered at all, or that there was any veiled woman there?"

"No, no; I do not doubt that, my friend."

"I should hope not. For if those happenings were likewise hallucinations, how account for my bed being slung around, for the guarded door being opened, and for the poison in Miss Haworth's night-draught?"

"But I am not expressing a doubt of those things, Nordensterne, but only of the young

women as participants. Haven't I seen that veiled creature myself, and even felt her occult power?"

"Good, then! And I'll swear that the guarded door was unfastened on the *inside*, just before my hearing Greeta's voice at odds, as you might say, with that of Maida."

"Ah, but you did not see Greeta enter?"

"No, not exactly, being then immovable, with my eyes charmed to the front."

"Not at all, then?"

"No, I didn't see her enter, or see her at all."

"There you are, then. You judged only by the single sense of hearing—notoriously the most susceptible of the entire five to hallucinatory errors in nervous derangement—as in the case of the altercating voices thereafter."

"My nerves weren't deranged," retorted Nordensterne, a little doggedly. "They never are. I was simply spellbound for the time being."

"The same thing. I am perhaps a better judge of that than you, my dear sir."

"Mr. Nordensterne?" for the first time interposed Salome, a little timidly.

"Yes?"

He turned toward her, his voice unconsciously softening and sweetening in a way that evoked a swift, uneasy glance from the professor.

"You really believe that the young women were actually present?"

"I do."

"And that, after some sort of altercation, they united their efforts in successfully interposing to save you from the veiled woman's menacing dagger?"

"Yes."

"What then, do you suppose, could have influenced them to such contradictory action?"

"I—really—don't—know," replied Nordensterne, slowly and deliberately, being in a measure prepared for the question, and conscious that she was furtively studying him.

The falsehood was reluctantly enough spoken, inasmuch as a confession of the truth would obviously have assisted his argument, but was at the same time creditable to his manliness in view of the young women's reputation for modesty, apart from any natural embarrassment or "sheepishness" of his own in the matter.

Salome gave a queer little laugh, altogether different from the ordinarily bubbling and rippling one.

"How odd!" she murmured, with an attempt at raillery or jocoseness. "One might imagine them both in love with you, Mr. Nordensterne."

"Oh, no, miss; really not so bad as that, I trust."

"Of course," suddenly struck in Dr. Dreamthorpe, with ill-suppressed impatience, "we—that is Miss Haworth and I—cannot offer an opposing impression as to the Berlioz girl individually, whose seeming participation in the strange affair is so new to us. But we have questioned Greeta closely, and with the result of absolving her in our minds from at least any conscious complicity, which would also let Maida out of it, you know."

"Conscious," eh?" observed Nordensterne, suddenly pricking up his ears, as it were.

"Yes."

"What was the gist of Greeta's denials, pray?"

"Simply that she was utterly at a loss to understand the suspicion you had so roughly cast upon her. All she professed to know or remember was having sunk to sleep in the chair by the bedside, until you awakened her and sent for me."

"But could she have really engaged in the affair, after all, as claimed by me, unconsciously?"

"It is not beyond possibility."

"How?—as a somnambulist?" ironically.

"Something like it—say, as a subject of hypnotic influence, or animal magnetism. Something of the sort seems to have been exerted by that terrible veiled creature even upon yourself, as you acknowledge."

"True," and the detective was now less incredulous. Then he abruptly looked up, saying: "And the Berlioz girl, too?"

"With equal possibility. And why not?" continued the professor. "A wonderful, little understood thing, this animal magnetism, of whose capacity or limitations there is yet nothing but vague speculation."

"I should say so."

"Besides, was not the sleep from which you aroused Greeta an apparently genuine one?"

"Yes."

"Might it not have been, from your recollection, an exceptionally heavy or unnatural sleep, perhaps akin to trance?"

"I'll admit that, too."

"Well, I have likewise taken that into account, and so, I think, has Salome."

The detective, after a moment's troubled pause, was once more his practical self.

"So, then," he remarked, abruptly, "you believe, or have come to the conclusion, as I take it, that the case is just this: That Greeta (the other girl coming under the same head) either did not enter my room at all, save in my diseased imagination at the time, or that she en-

tered it unconsciously to herself, at the silent magnetic command of the veiled woman?"

Dreamthorpe nodded, but Salome, on being likewise appealed to by a look, merely kept looking straight before her, with no sign one way or the other.

"You believe as I have set forth, then?" continued the detective, concentrating his query upon the professor alone.

"I do," was the response.

"Well, I don't," bluntly. "If those young women were in my room at all, (I'll give them the benefit of the doubt, otherwise) they were there of their own volition, and no more under hypnotic or other irresponsible conditions than you, Doctor Dreamthorpe, are at this moment."

"Ah?"

"Yes, and positively! I either heard their voices, or only imagined I heard them. As I have said, they can have the benefit of the doubt here. But if I really did hear them, it was wholly, absolutely in their respective individual characters. They were surprised at meeting one another there, and doubtless on the same errand—that of saving my life from a would-be murderer. They quarreled over the matter first in the most natural manner in the world, if not altogether to the credit of their maidenly discretion. Then they joined forces in their interposition in my defense, and quite as matter-of-factly. Whether each was there individually by preconcert with the veiled woman herself, though each without the other's knowledge, of course there is no telling. This is the long and short of it, in my practical opinion. I'll now go on with the second part of my story, if you are ready for it."

More than that, both his auditors, and Dreamthorpe especially, seemed to welcome the proposition as a positive relief.

The detective then, and with scarcely a break, gave the story of his experience in the north wing from the moment of entering upon its farago of horrors to his plunge into the outer terrors of the blizzard.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SIFTINGS.

THE description of the appalling game of football with the severed head, especially, seemed to hold Dr. Dreamthorpe with a no less fascinating horror than it did Salome herself.

"You can imagine my sympathy with your dismay in that scene," he said, "when I tell you that it must have been more or less a reproduction of what I myself saw in the loft on the occasion of my one visit there at the midnight hour, attended by Hannibal and Johann."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and you cannot be wrong in deeming it all a piece of ghastly trickery."

"Did you pick up the head, then, in the strange semi-darkness, or lurid illumination, as I did?"

"Precisely, both Hannibal and Johann being meanwhile already frozen against the door with the preliminary horror."

"What sort of head and face in your case?"

"Let me ask for your description first, Nordensterne. For I think we have the same idea."

"The head that I picked up then and there," said the detective, "was apparently that of a young and beautiful woman. It had an abundance of glossy but rather coarse black hair in coils. The face, though perfectly bloodless, was full, round, brunette, and small-featured, save the mouth which was large, one of the front upper teeth, as partly displayed by the shrinking lips, being absent. The eyes, open and staring, were black and had doubtless been brilliant and attractive in life—a good deal such eyes as your maid Greeta has, Miss Haworth, now that I come to think of it."

Salome nodded a little coldly, and there was the suggestion of a movement behind the *portiere*, though apparently unheeded.

Dr. Dreamthorpe clapped his hands together.

"A cunning piece of realism," he exclaimed, "but none the less indubitably a trick, for all that!"

"Does my description agree with yours, then?" asked Nordensterne.

"To a dot, head for head! Now my experience with it was months ago—far longer than any real human head could be preserved from corruption."

"Wait! Soon after this I found this same head in the snow."

Here the detective anticipated his narrative by describing the find and subsequent loss, such as the reader is already familiar with.

"Here is the piece of the neck that broke off in my hand," he added, in conclusion, producing the object.

Salome gazed at it curiously, while the professor at once subjected the fragment to an interested scrutiny.

"Rubber, cunningly coated with some flesh-resembling substance which I shall determine later on," he declared, with a chuckle. "At all events, no flesh and blood. Yes," half to himself, "a clever stage-property, a clever bugaboo! Ah, why didn't I suspect it before?"

"Perhaps it was the overpowering blood-

smell, that mastered your faculties, as it did mine."

"Most likely, most likely! That is inexplicable, as yet."

"Doctor, could the head have been charged with blood, so as to cause that horrible splashing and squashing as it was kicked about by the veiled woman's masked crew, doubtless for my special edification?"

"Why not? With the appearance of blood, yes. You saw, as I did, that no marks were left on floor or wall after the devil's sport had ceased?"

"That is true. How I wish that I hadn't lost that head in the snow!"

"So do I. It might have been an interesting study. However, the melodrama managers and professional jugglers doubtless invented similar and better sham-horrors for our mystification."

"Tell me one other thing. Could that appalling blood-smell be likewise the result of juggling, say by the use of chemicals?"

"Ah; haven't I thought of that? That explained, my dear Nordensterne, and—apart from the chief haunter's hypnotic or mesmerizing gifts, which I think as unquestionable that she must possess in an extraordinary degree—what would remain of the terrors of our haunted north wing? A bagatelle of cheap clap-trap to cause us to hang our heads at the recollection of what they have cost us in nervous alarm and school-boy fears!"

"You have thought of it, you say? With what result?"

"With no satisfactory result as yet."

"Then you are not yet certain that the terrible smell is a reality or an artificial imitation?"

"Not yet, not yet! But I am trying and experimenting at odd times. If I succeed in discovering the secret, you shall be informed at once, and we ought to have plainer sailing after that. Patience, my friend, patience!"

"But really now, gentlemen," interposed Miss Haworth, with something the reverse of the virtue recommended, at this juncture, "isn't there about enough of this blood-and-head discussion? I propose that Mr. Nordensterne go on with his story to the end. I find myself anticipating his adventures in the blizzard that is just raging around us with more interest than anything that has preceded it."

The detective accordingly told the remainder of his story, in the fullest detail, and with but a single reservation.

This was Greeta Muller's avowed relationship with Koffsky, as impelling her to connive in his escape.

The narrative in its entirety, as a matter of course, produced a profound impression upon its auditors.

"This is truly extraordinary, Nordensterne," commented Dreamthorpe, with more excitement than he often betrayed—"a signal enough proof of the old saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Bless me, I should say so! how so much startling and varied adventure could have been crowded into such brief space seems all but incredible."

"The finding of that poor frozen body in the snow was too sad for anything!" murmured Salome. "And then that miserable step-father of mine in connection with those miscreants!" indignantly. "But, thank Heaven, he is no real relation to me! I will have nothing more to do with him, even out of commiseration, and I shall instruct my lawyers accordingly!"

"Dismiss it from your mind now, my dear cousin!" cried the professor, secretly delighted. "But I have long suspected the Hungarian as being allied with our arch-enemy, apart from what Nordensterne had told me."

Then Miss Haworth seemed to be chiefly concerned over the hardships the detective had undergone.

"You must be of iron to have withstood it all—of nothing less than iron!" she exclaimed, with a fitting sympathy of glance, tone and manner as grateful to him as it was probably just the reverse to the professor, who, however, had now grown very guarded. "It is a passage of the blizzard hardships that we read of as occurring in the Northwest, with the addition of the discoveries that you made."

"The latter are the only features really worth considering, miss," replied the detective, modestly.

"Most important!" interjected the professor.

"Bad as they are," continued Salome, "I do hope, Mr. Nordensterne, that the men you surprised at the mouth of the snow-tunnel were left in no danger of likewise freezing to death."

"Not the slightest, miss, you can make yourself easy on that score," was the response. "The temperature in the tunnel is at least twenty degrees higher than outside, which is appreciable even in zero weather. And, besides their being fairly well clad, I took care to pack them under nicely, with just space enough for their breathing freely. I am confident that ere this they have roused up, and made their way to the house-boat."

"Then that other man whom you—you were really compelled to kill!" with a slight shudder. "It seems awful when I think of it, though even more awful was the narrowness of your escape from being killed by him!"

"Thanks, Miss Haworth! The fortune of war, that was all. But had you caught a glimpse of the murderous Swede's face, it would have haunted you. Never, to my recollection, have I seen such unrelieved savagery and malignity in a human face—at least in a man's face!"

CHAPTER XXX.

DREAMTHORPE AND THE DETECTIVE.

At this juncture in the discussion Dr. Dreamthorpe made a slight gesture of impatience.

"But I propose that we sum up," he said, with a glance of real anxiety at his fair patient, who was for a truth showing signs of fatigue. "Salome must not remain sitting up any longer than it will require for me to prepare her medicine. In the mean time, Nordensterne, you can give us your opinion of the entire situation as it now stands, and what we had better do with regard to it." And he proceeded to his furnace as he spoke.

"My opinion is an encouraging one," replied the detective, still unmindful of Greeta doubtless lurking within hearing, "and may be briefly stated."

"That is the talk, my friend." Dreamthorpe was now proceeding with his distillation. "What do you think, then?"

"That the blizzard is our friend. It has fairly frozen up the veiled woman and her crew in their water-side, ice-bound fastness—I have already told you of the woman's enforced return from her attempt to cross the river. Well, for several days at least, I predict that she and her myrmidons will be equally bound in by the snow.—Could we but muster the requisite police assistance, we might make a descent upon them forthwith, and wind up the entire affair."

"Ah, but that requisite assistance? Are we not equally in the blizzard's smothering grip? It continues unabated, will doubtless outlast this night, and I doubt if any communication can be had with down-town on our own part for several days."

Here he came forward with the draught, which Salome took from him and began to sip with her accustomed submissiveness.

"I have thought of that," replied Nordensterne, confidently. "Of course, we must bide our time, but leave it to me for our not being caught napping. "He then suddenly dropped his voice to a whisper: "I must explore Miss Haworth's apartments before she retires. The inside fastening of the corridor door communicating with my room must be seen to. Leave me to deal with Greeta. Don't oppose, follow or molest me."

With that, he noiselessly stepped to the *portiere*, opened it and passed within the passage.

The girl was there listening, as he had surmised.

She looked up, started and not a little confused, but obeyed him as he signed her to silence.

Then, seizing her wrist, he drew her along with him, the soft carpets rendering the footsteps soundless, along the corridor, through Miss Haworth's bedchamber, where not a pause was made, and thence into the adjoining ideal boudoir, already illuminated with its delicate pink luster.

Here he released his grasp, simply and calmly confronting her, while she lowered her flushed face before his searching but not unkindly gaze, clasping her hands before her.

"Greeta!"

"Yes, Mr. Nordensterne."

"I have known that you were listening from the first."

"Ah, sir! but really—"

"Hush! I am going to punish you for it, but not, perhaps, in the way you might anticipate."

She looked up at him wonderingly.

"I am going to trust you," he went on.

"To trust me?" she repeated, falteringly.

"Yes, you, and absolutely. I do not believe that you really hate me."

"Hate you?" she again clasped her hands, a beautiful softening coming into her dark face and fine eyes. "Oh, Mr. Nordensterne!"

"Listen, then. Can I trust you?"

"Yes, you can, sir!" impulsively. "How good of you not to give up my secret to those two!"

"And, as between your fealty to that veiled demoness—whoever or whatever she may be—and myself, you will give me your undivided devotion?"

"Yes, I will. I swear it! if, if—only—"

"If only what?" with man-like stupidity, now that it was a heart question.

"If—if only you will love me just a little bit!"

It was audible, and that was all, her flushing face again dropping under his gaze, which was now sufficiently stern.

"Greeta, it cannot be," he replied, steadily—"never! and not even the least little bit."

"Ah!" with a despairing passionateness; "it is because—"

"Do not say what is in your mind—I will not have it! It is not as you suppose, but simply because I could not love you, even did I care to, pretty as you are."

Then, as her pitiable shame-facedness returned, he continued, with a sigh:

"I see that I was mistaken in the innate nobleness which I thought to be yours."

"No, no, no!" pleadingly. "Do not say that, Mr. Nordensterne!"

"But it was perhaps too much to ask or expect of you. To suppose that you would or could be unreservedly on my side in this accursed battle with that woman-fiend and her robber crew, merely in the cause of right and of virtue! Absurd!"

"No, no; wait!"

She pressed her hands to her breast, swinging them hard, her face still bowed.

When she looked up again, it was pale, but determined, as if an internal battle, brief but desperate had been fought and won.

"You shall not be disappointed in me, Mr. Nordensterne," she said, collectedly, but keeping her eyes averted. "I accept the confidence that you place in me, and will not betray it."

There was the impress of truthfulness in her voice and manner, that could not but challenge his respect no less than his self-complacency over the venture he had made in confiding in her; for it was a venture that he would not have risked with the majority of young women under similarly painful or emotional circumstances—with the colorless, but perhaps equally passionate and ill-governed, Maida Berlioz, for instance.

He murmured his acknowledgments and held out his hand.

She placed hers in it spiritlessly, but with a promptness and firmness which were a sufficient pledge.

"Now," said the detective, "I must feel that Doctor Dreamthorpe's patient is absolutely secure from a repetition of last night's visitation. That is the first thing, my dear friend."

"You shall be made easy on that score at once," she replied, coldly. "Come with me, sir."

She forthwith led him into the narrow corridor, and thence to the re-secured door which he had vainly undertaken to guard on the previous night.

The entrance behind was left open, so that the soft light from the boudoir penetrated into the passage.

The door was seen to be secured by a large double-bolted lock of peculiar construction.

"That lock," observed the girl, in the same cold, even voice, "is said to be invulnerable to the most expert of picklocks. Examine it, please, and see if that is your opinion."

He briefly scrutinized the lock, and arose with a nod.

"It is unpickable—quite burglar-proof, solely barring the possession of a duplicate key," he assented.

The wall was prettily papered with a soft mauve, dotted with little silver and gold stars.

Reaching high up on the left, Greeta touched one of the stars, and there opened a small secret receptacle, whose presence would not have been suspected by the closest scrutiny, out of which she took a large steel key, after which the receptacle was made to disappear.

"It is the key," she said, placing it in his hand, "and there is no duplicate. Your Salome is henceforth safe from this quarter at least."

"But," he said, "Doctor Dreamthorpe told me that this key was in his locked cabinet."

"I obtained it from there—no matter how."

He would have thanked her more earnestly than he did, but for the fling, or bitterness, implied in her words when placing the key in his hand.

"Oh, do not mind me!" she went on, with a strange, mirthless smile. "If she shall remain safe at the cost of my life, what difference will it make?"

"Your life?" exclaimed the detective. "Good heavens! but you don't mean it, Greeta?"

"Don't I? You don't know her—the mistress as I do, nor how treachery to her is repaid. But come; you have already been too long with me." And she hurried him back through the rooms.

In Miss Haworth's sleeping apartment, she drew back the *portiere* of the corridor communicating with the laboratory, and indicated the open door behind it.

"That is provided with a similar lock," she observed. "You can trust in me—while I live. I will be the turnkey here every night after mademoiselle shall have retired."

"Noble girl!"

He again held out his hand.

She gave a low little moan, like a dumb creature in sudden pain, snatched up his hand to her lips, and, darting into her own little room, closed the door behind her.

Nordensterne had not been absent from the laboratory more than ten minutes, but when he again entered it Dreamthorpe gave him a furtively jealous glance, to which, however, he paid not the slightest heed.

"Miss Haworth may rest perfectly easy hereafter," he remarked. "Her night-draught will not be tampered with again; I am satisfied of that."

Salome expressed her gratefulness, without asking for particulars, and Greeta just then coming in to attend her, she bade them good-night.

The Drop Detective.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LAST CONSULTATION.

IMMEDIATELY following Miss Haworth's departure, the two men drew their chairs closer together, as if impelled by a common instinct to the effect that much was still left unsaid, while the professor produced some of his choice cigars from a close-at-hand drawer.

Nordensterne began by telling him of what had passed with Greeta in the way of the trust that had been proffered and accepted, but without reference to the sentimental feature of it.

"This is very encouraging," commented Dr. Dreamthorpe, with much heartiness, real or assumed. "With the girl on guard in her mistress's apartments, while Hannibal and Johann take turns over the loft door in your own room, Salome ought to feel secure at last, and I shall also feel greatly relieved. You have taken the best of precautions, my friend."

"Thank you, doctor," replied the detective. "Then the men asked your permission before arranging to mount guard in my room."

"Of course, and it was given readily enough. We shall now, I hope, be able to rest with some feeling of security all around."

"Doctor, there are a number of points in our mystery which I have reserved for this private discussion with you."

"So I supposed. Begin at the beginning, then, my dear Nordensterne. And let us hope that 'our mystery,' as you call it, is on the threshold of its final extinction."

"I feel that we can hope that, dear doctor, and with the best of reasons."

"One of my chief remaining mystifications, then, with reference to the loft-horrors that I underwent, was the extraordinary passage of time, without my being conscious of it."

"Ah!"
"I confronted them at or about midnight—the witching hour, you know—which was instantly after my return to my room from the episode in Miss Haworth's apartments, where I left you alone at your patient's bedside."

Dreamthorpe gravely nodded.
"Well, the preliminary diabolism, the ghastly football game and the rest of it did not seem to have lasted a long hour; and yet when I was able to consult my watch by the lantern's light, it was five in the morning.

"Five hours, expanded out of what had seemed less than one! Even at this moment I find it difficult to realize it."

"I see. You were simply mesmerized, and such unconsciousness of the passage of time is readily produced under hypnotic conditions."

"Were you affected similarly when undergoing the same experience with your two servants?"

"Precisely, though in a somewhat lesser degree."

"But the football sport with the head—it was doubtless in both instances the acme of the jugglery prepared for our special mystification and dismay?"

"Doubtless, together with the blood-smell, the phantom luridity, and the kindred accessories."

"Yes; but how could it have lasted that unconscionable length of time? Why, it would be a physical impossibility on the part of the participants!"

"It would certainly seem so. But I cannot enlighten you on this point, my dear sir, which puzzled me in my own case no less than it does you; save by suggesting that our preliminary trance-state must have consumed the greater portion of the time unaccounted for."

"Ah, well! then I suppose I must remain unsatisfied on that point."

"I see no help for it. At my leisure, I shall place the matter before some scientists with whom I am informally associated, several of whom have made a specialty of hypnotic investigation."

"Let us proceed to your next point, my dear Nordensterne."

"With all my heart," and the detective made a dismissive gesture. "But it may betray some fresh information on my part, that may cause you no little surprise."

"No matter; proceed. But stay; would you like me to order a little refreshment?"

"Not any for me, thanks!"

"Proceed, then."

"Doctor, what may you know already about this fellow Koffsky?"

The professor deliberated a moment before saying contemptuously, in response:

"But little more than that he is a pestilent, unprincipled rascal."

"A Hungarian?"

"I believe so."

"And so is Miss Haworth's maid, the girl Greeta Muller."

"Yes, I believe so. But what of that, my friend?"

"What I am going to tell you must be in the strictest confidence."

"You have my word."

"The young woman is the fellow's daughter."

Dreamthorpe stared, and then his face quickly darkened, seemingly with troubled and fast-throbbing thoughts.

"You are sure of this, Nordensterne!" he demanded.

"To a moral certainty." And the detective related the reserved portion of Greeta's connection with Koffsky's escape.

The professor struck the table with his open hand.

"There was always something mysterious," he exclaimed—"something unsatisfactory—in her coming here, to take Salome's French maid's place! And now the explanation would seem to be coming out."

"Pray explain to me, then, doctor; for you can imagine my interest in the matter, as doubtless bearing upon our chief business in hand."

"Of course, of course!" moodily, "but I don't see how I can very readily. To tell the truth, I hardly know how or where to begin."

"Perhaps, I can help you out a bit."

"I wish you would try, then."

"You were doubtless acquainted with Miss Salome's parents?"

"I should say so. Her father was my first cousin—that is, by the ordinary genealogical standard—yes, my first cousin."

"Give me a brief sketch of her family history, if you will?"

"Why not? Her father died, immensely rich, when she was but an infant, leaving all his wealth to the widow, who was also made the executor, in trust for the girl, and naming me as the reversionary heir, in the event of the direct line failing of issue."

"Salome's mother was a very beautiful, but somewhat frivolous, or at best visionary, woman of French extraction."

"How she got acquainted with that cheap-Jack rascal, Koffsky, or how she came to marry him, I have never fully understood. But both events happened while the widow and daughter were traveling in Germany about five years ago."

"The man was already, however, or pretended to be, a naturalized American. At all events, he had really lived in New York, where he had made an unenviable reputation as a quack doctor, of risky methods, and an advertiser of illegitimate nostrums."

"But he had failed in business, and was practically an adventurer, without a dollar. After his lucky marriage, he was, of course, in high feather; though I doubt not that the poor woman's eyes were speedily opened to his true character. Salome has hinted to me that there were innumerable bickerings, to put it mildly, and that there was no love lost between the pair when her mother died, two years later, or about three years ago, just as the young lady was entering upon her majority."

"Then the fellow was pensioned off, and he has been the pestilent, whining, disappointed scoundrel that you know him to be ever since. That is all."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CONSULTATION, CONTINUED.

"I SHALL take the liberty, doctor, of asking any questions that occur to me as necessary," said Nordensterne, when the professor had finished his family sketch.

"That is right, Mr. Nordensterne," was the response. "I hardly think I shall have occasion to complain."

"Let me first ask then, if, to your knowledge, this man Koffsky had ever been married before?"

"Yes, I think so," slowly, and with a knitting of the brows. "That is, Therese—or I should say, my wife—was of that opinion."

"Oh!"

"Yes. You see," reluctantly, "she for some reason had less dislike for the fellow than I, and I suppose he made her the recipient of some of his confidences."

"Any particulars?"

"Only to the effect that he had been married in Hungary to one of his countrywomen before meeting with Mrs. Haworth."

"Offspring?"

"No—wait—yes! Ah, now I remember. Yes, I am quite sure Therese—ahem! Madam Dreamthorpe, you know—had been told of a child, a little girl, left somewhere in Hungary."

"So, that would be Greeta."

"Yes; it would seem so."

"Doctor?"—with hesitation.

"Go on, my friend."

"Madam Dreamthorpe was also a Hungarian, I have been given to understand?"

"Quite right, my friend," composedly.

"I have heard you speak of the lady having a sister who resembled her greatly in personal appearance?"

"I have anticipated the question. Yes, there was such a one."

"What about her?"

"My friend, I know almost nothing, and that not of any good."

"I beg of you to tell me what you do know, doctor."

"I never saw the woman but two or three times. Those were when she visited us here, but a few months previous to my wife's disappearance. My dislike for the woman doubtless aggravated subsequently our marital estrangements, which even previously had been

growing steadily from bad to worse. Soon after that I understood she had returned to Europe."

"She was or had been married?"

"I believe so."

"Any child, or children?"

"Not that I ever heard of, though there might have been. But really, my dear Nordensterne—"

"Patience, professor! the relevancy of my inquisitiveness will presently appear."

"Very well, then, my friend."

"What was Therese's—I beg your pardon, Madam Dreamthorpe's—sister's name?"

"You need not have begged pardon, my friend. Nearly every one called my wife Therese, or Madame Therese, or, in speaking of her, the Grand Therese. The sister called herself Sturheim—given name, Natchina, or Natchka for short. Their family, or maiden, name was Ripoiki."

"I must try your patience yet further, doctor."

"Proceed, my friend," was the resigned response. And the professor lighted a second cigar, a most unusual thing with him.

"What of your wife's family when you married into it? Did you know much of them, or of her antecedents?"

"Almost nothing, and that but little to their credit," with frank simplicity. "When we were married, which was about fifteen years ago, Therese was living alone in Buda-Pesth, an employee of some chemical works there, and very poor. So was I just then, for that matter. Her family was by common repute, of pure Gypsy extraction. You must understand, however, that the Tcherskina or Gypsy population of the Danubian provinces is a very considerable one, which has long since lost its roving characteristics, though dwelling for the most part in communities by themselves, and many of their families are of wealth and importance."

The detective nodded.

"Well, Therese was probably of one of these. She never acknowledged or denied it, but maintained an indifferent reticence on the subject, which I had no desire to break. In fact, I never knew or cared if she had a blood relative living until the sister suddenly turned up in New York years later."

"You are sure you were not practiced upon—that they were really sisters?"

"Well, I should say so; and so would you or any one else be sure of it."

"They were so much alike?"

"Yes, in person no less than disposition; though Therese was the handsomer, while, 'philosophically,' the other struck me as being perhaps a little the worst devil of the two."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes. You see this is what has influenced me not a little in supposing that Natchina and this vailed demoness that we are dealing with might be, and indeed most probably are, one and the same."

"Might it not have been she, however, and not your wife, whose lifeless remains you identified and buried?"

"Ah, I understand—which would make out Therese, instead of Natchka, as our woman in black?"

"Exactly."

"No," abruptly; "nothing of the kind. Altogether impossible."

"You will pardon me, I hope, for pursuing this painful subject so persistently?"

"Oh, yes; proceed, proceed."

"I have learned that the face of the remains which you identified as your wife's was all but unrecognizable by burns."

"That is true; but there were body marks that rendered a mistake of identification impossible—or all but impossible."

"But, otherwise, the remains might have been those of the sister?"

"Yes, yes; might have been. There, there, my good friend."

"Doctor, I wish to learn something about Miss Haworth's French maid, whose place Greeta now occupies in her service."

Dreamthorpe looked a little surprised at the abrupt change of subject, which, however, seemed to come as a relief to him.

"Ah, that was Rose Planchez," he replied. "A nice, discreet girl. But then Rose died in the hospital, you know."

"So I have been informed. It was before your wife's disappearance, I believe?"

"Yes; very shortly before that."

"And before Koffsky had ceased his unwelcome visits here?"

"H'm! I believe so—very likely."

"Before or after Natchina had ceased hers?"

"Doubtless, later on. But really, I can't remember exactly. What are you driving at, Nordensterne?"

"At more truths than one. Doctor, had you ever seen Greeta, or had Miss Haworth ever seen her, prior to her application for the employment following the French maid's death?"

"I think not."

"How did she come to know of the vacancy, and make the application to fill it?"

"Pshaw! how should I know? In fact, I don't think she made any application, in the regular form."

"Oho!"

"No. My wife happened to discover Greeta somewhere, and spoke of her to Salome. That is how it came about, to the best of my recollection."

"Ah! This may be one of the truths I have been driving at. It is exceedingly important."

"I don't see the special importance of it, my friend."

"You will very shortly. Was not the illness that proved fatal to Rose Planchez somewhat mysterious, professor?"

"As to its inception, yes; puzzling alike to me, and to the hospital physicians who treated her subsequently."

"But not also as to its symptoms and progress?"

"Well, yes, but less pronouncedly so. A sort of marasmus, accompanying a general nervous debilitation, which was simply unconquerable."

"Having any resemblance to what you are now treating Miss Haworth for?"

"Yes," slowly, and as yet unsuspiciously. "The Planchez case was analogous in its symptoms, but of a more violent and dangerous form."

"Why was the maid sent from here to a public hospital?"

"It was at her own insistence, and even against Salome's remonstrance."

"But why?"

"Well," hesitatingly, "you see, the girl never got on well with Therese, and had conceived a sort of terror of her. I suppose that was the chief reason."

"Terror of her?"

"Yes, yes!" a little testily. "You should have inferred that Therese wasn't the best to get along with."

"Especially with those who crossed her path, or stood in her way?"

"I suppose so. But what do you mean?"

"I am coming now to the truths, or inferences, that I have been fishing for."

"Indeed?"

"Has it ever occurred to you, doctor, that your wife poisoned the poor French maid?"

Dreamthorpe started.

"Bless me, no!" he exclaimed. "Unprincipled as I do not hesitate to admit that she was, why should Therese have done this?"

"To make room for Koffsky's daughter, Greeta—doubtless her own niece."

"Heavens! you think that?"

"Yes; it comes on me like a revelation."

"That Greeta is also Natchina Sturnheim's daughter?"

"Exactly; and consequently that Koffsky was Natchina's husband, long before the latter's meeting with Miss Haworth's mother."

"Far-fetched, my dear friend," composedly once more, "decidedly far-fetched."

"I don't think so."

"Well, admitting the supposition of relationship for the sake of argument: why should Therese have wished to have her niece in the French maid's place?"

"That she might have Salome more thoroughly in her power, and be enabled to poison her at leisure, and more unsuspectingly."

Dr. Dreamthorpe sprung to his feet, once more white and trembling.

"Good God!" he faltered; "you believe all this stuff, Nordensterne?"

"I do, implicitly."

The professor paced the floor in much excitement, but presently grew more calm.

"Suppose you state the entire complication," he said, coming to a halt, "as you now conceive it."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAIDA AGAIN.

"My theory of the complication, I suppose you mean?" replied the detective.

The professor, calm again, though with his face still pale and drawn, bowed his head in assent.

"It is this, and this is not the first time I have hinted it," continued Nordensterne, with abrupt and stern impressiveness: "That, having thus fearlessly and murderously prepared her way to the accomplishment of her great criminal end, your wife, the Grand Therese, administered to Salome, secretly and with her own hands, the deadly poison you have since been engaged, so painstakingly and conscientiously, in eradicating."

"She confessed the deed to you immediately after its commission, declaring her object to be your inheritance of your cousin's princely wealth, which she proposed to help you to enjoy right royally."

"But to her amazement, and notwithstanding the commanding influence that she may have theretofore had over you, you received the announcement with fury and despair, the proposition with loathing, indignation and disgust."

"More than this, her crime proved to be the instrument that snapped her spell, doubtless even turning whatever love her dark beauty might have theretofore inspired you with into loathing and hate."

"It is more than likely that you did not merely stop with rushing to the rescue of her in-

tended victim—that, in addition to this, you cast the demoness off with denunciations and menaces of giving her up to justice in any event."

"You had been the Antony to her serpent-charm, but you were too sterling-principled—apart from your affection for Salome, which may not have as yet ripened into love—to become the Macbeth to her ambition and her crime."

Dreamthorpe, who had been regarding the speaker with mingled wonder and terror, here held up his hand, and there was a pause.

Then he sank into a chair, momentarily burying his face in his hands from which, however, he looked up presently, with a worn and aged look, saying in a hollow voice, while essaying to smile ironically:

"Go on, then, go on! You know it all, of course; why don't you go on?"

But Nordensterne was not to be deceived by such weak bantering, and was quite clear that his shrewd inductive reasoning was touching the spot every time, unerringly, relentlessly.

"Terrified, or at least dismayed," he went on, with the same stern, imperturbable impressiveness, as if no interruption had taken place, "by her unlooked-for defeat, by your menaces, and by the irrevocable loathing with which she saw that her confession had inspired you, the woman fled."

"But does the evil purpose of such a sin-steepled nature content itself with a primary defeat? Never!"

"Already doubtless with an initial murder on her hands—that of Rose Planchez, the French maid—to say nothing of what secret her early past might hold—a past of which her husband confesses his ignorance—is it in the character of such a fearless and ruthless adventuress to accept her failure as ultimate, her overthrow as irretrievable, and calmly, hopelessly despair? Not so—never so with unconscionable crime, with the arch and inborn criminal, in my experience!"

"She passes, not only out of human sight, but apparently out of human life itself, but as a secure preparation for the continued prosecution for the one great object of her demon-soul, the glittering, blood-girt lode-star of her evil aspirations."

"It could not have been her remains, but was doubtless those of her sister, that you identified, amid the wreck of the charred train."

"It is in keeping with argument, with the dramatic sequences of fate, that it should be so."

"You speak of bodily marks. Fudge! If the sisters mirrored each other so closely in face and form and contour, why not equally so in birthmarks or physical defects? At all events, it is not impossible."

"The woman is here now, as the vailed leader of this robber band, as this mesmerizing enemy in the dark, as the black-robed masquerading haunter of the north wing, is, in fact, Therese herself, implacable, ruthless, mysterious, powerful, terrible!

"The hideousness of that corpse-like face beneath the vail, like an illuminated death-mask, as once revealed to us! Ah, no need to forget that. For might not that be a juggling deception, of a piece with the blood-smell, the artificial head, the ghoul-like lurid glare?

"Then as to the she-fiend's purpose, so boldly and cunningly persisted in, need inference or conjecture step out far for a clew? At all events, her murderous project once accomplished, and Salome dead, what more consistent than for her to declare herself anew to you, and this time with menace to counter menace, accusation to oppose accusation."

"Here, man," she might say, "this deed is your deed! Who would so benefit by Salome's death as yourself? That you may have loved her I care not, now that she is gone, now that the world, the mercenary world, would receive such a statement, in opposition to the wealth that her death has made you master of, with mockery and derision. But the poison has left no trace, there is nothing lingering but could defy analysis, justice is unsuspicious, unless I speak to denounce you with the crime. Come, it shall be with us together as in the old days, for my bodily beauty is yet supreme, if my soul is lost. It shall be share and share alike between us with this princely wealth. Otherwise—well, defy me if you dare!"

"That, sir, is my theory of the complication, past, present and future." Such were the detective's concluding words.

Dreamthorpe had at last listened to him with a Sphinx-like expression on his face and eyes that was not interpretable.

He now simply stretched out his hand, saying dispassionately:

"Nordensterne, you are too much of a genius to remain a simple detective. But let us now separate for the night. I must think these things—these clever speculations of yours—over in the solitude of my chamber. Good-night!"

The detective grasped the extended hand, and at once retired.

A clock in the dining-room below struck the hour of eleven as he closed the laboratory door behind him.

Then, as he was proceeding to his room, a not unfamiliar touch was laid upon him, and the

blonde Maida was before him in the dim light of the hall-passage.

He did not this time resent the meeting, though he had not expected it.

"You again, Maida?" he said, indifferently, but with less of distaste in his tone than theretofore.

"Yes, Mr. Nordensterne," and she readily controlled the excitement or timidity attendant upon the first glance of his eyes, which always seemed to have in them something of a rebuke for her. "I simply could not help lying in wait for you once more, even at the risk of incurring your continued reproof or contempt. But this time I have an excuse, monsieur; it is something really important."

"Tell me what it is, then."

"Of course, monsieur will not deem it strange that I should have heard something of his terrible experiences and adventures?"

"No; that is something of them. What then?"

Her next words unexpectedly quickened his interest.

"Was—was monsieur," she hesitated, casting down her cold, bright eyes, "under the impression at any time last night of Greeta and me being in his room, together with—with some one else!"

"Yes, I was," he replied quickly. "And so you were, as a matter of course. Is it not true?"

She bowed her head yet lower.

"Yes," she murmured.

"How came you to be there?"

"I can only speak for myself, Monsieur Nordensterne."

"Do so, then."

"It was because I could not help it," she murmured—"because I was commanded."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNBROKEN REST.

"YOU were commanded?" repeated the detective, with purposed incredulity in his voice.

"It is the truth, monsieur; I call on the Virgin Mother to witness it!" And the Swiss riddle in petticoats, who was or assumed to be exceedingly pious, crossed herself impressively.

"Ah, indeed! Well, then, so was Greeta, most likely."

"I know nothing of that—that black creature!" with a metallic ring in the cold voice.

"Greeta must answer for herself."

"Humph! doubtless, if called upon to do so." And Nordensterne still abstained from direct questioning, feeling quite confident that all would come out through the girl's eagerness, spitefulness, or whatever else might be impelling her.

"Monsieur," after a long pause, in which she seemed vainly waiting for him to manifest some impatience, "you do not seem to be very curious."

"Oh!" indifferently; "one may be that, you know, my dear, without being inquisitive, which would not be polite."

"My dear!" even this unconscious gentleness was caught at eagerly, for her eyes were suddenly less hard and cold in their brightness.

"Monsieur," she went on, "do you have any recollection of that strange scene over your prostrate and helpless body?"

"Yes, quite a distinct one, Maida, though I could only see the one actor in it."

"Ah! the Mistress, eh? the terrible veiled woman?"

"Yes."

"And you saw your life threatened—the vengeful, uplifted knife—the fatal blow averted?"

"I did."

"Oh, Monsieur Nordensterne! it may be an unbecoming thing for me to claim."

"What would you claim, Maida?"

"But it is true, sir, true as God's own truth!" earnestly enough, though she abstained from crossing herself now—or might she have forgotten it. "It was I who interposed, I who averted the descending blow. Yes; that is the truth, monsieur. Greeta had nothing to do with it. Indeed," overdoing it, "I doubt if she would have cared one way or the other."

Of course, Nordensterne, who had heard both girls' voices equally vehement and resolute in their interposition, knew this to be rankly false, but he gave no sign to that effect.

"Ah, but then it is greatly in your debt that I ought to consider myself, Maida," he returned.

"A brave deed, surely."

"Oh, sir!" yet more eagerly; "you really think so—you say it with your own lips?"

"Why not? And does one speak, save with the lips?"

"Monsieur," unconscious of the evasion, "you really consider that you owe your life—that you are indebted to me?" This with a warmth and fervor, or fever, that was wholly new to her, externally at least."

"Haven't I admitted it?"

"Ah! you can repay me so easily!"

"How?"

She hesitated, something like a blush, or the ghost of one, for the first time in his experience with her, pinking the excessive fairness of her face.

The Drop Detective.

"You will not think me forward—over-bold—indiscreet?" murmuringly.

"That depends, or I hope not," gravely. "What would you ask of me?"

Her face was bent low now, and she was picking at her dress with her long, slender fingers.

"You might give me your confidence, and—a little—just a tiny little—of your love, sir!"

"You ask an impossibility of me, Maida," with abrupt sternness and coldness. "I have nothing of the sort to give—for the asking."

"Ah!" bitterly; "if I were only rich, and refined, and elegant, like—"

"Stop! don't say what you have on your lips to say. I command it!"

She raised her face and eyes with a momentarily startled look.

"Well, then, only your confidence!" she pleaded.

He shook his head.

"Sir—Mr. Nordensterne—grant me this! It will mean more for you than you perhaps conceive."

"In what way?"
"I will be on your side!" she exclaimed, eagerly; "on your side even as against *her*, the Mistress, the sorceress, the terrible one! Don't shake your head again. I would even betray her to you, if—if—"

But he did shake his head again, and as she cut her words short, another and less agreeable expression came into her face, quite to the marring of its comeliness.

Nordensterne could not but forcibly contrast this interview with the one he had held with the nobler, but perhaps equally ill-balanced, Greeta, which were quite as opposed to one another as the persons and dispositions of the young women themselves.

The one interview he had sought; this one had sought him. In the one case, his confidence, as inimical to the vailed woman's interests, he had proffered; in this one, it was slavishly beseeched, the accompanying treason being eagerly volunteered as his allurement and bait.

If the colorless Swiss girl had inspired him with distrust before, he now felt little but contempt for her.

"Good-night, Maida," he said, coldly.

"Wait!" she laid her hand firmly on his arm, the disagreeable expression deepening in her face, her scintillant eyes contracting and even threatening. "Fool that I was not to suspect it before, all is plain to me now." With indescribable bitterness and spitefulness.

"Indeed? Well, I congratulate you on that, whatever it may be."

"She has been before me! I am forestalled! Yes, that is it."

"Who and what are you talking about?"

"Don't dare to mock me, Monsieur Nordensterne! As if you did not know! Greeta has forestalled me—the black Gypsy, of the hideous blue-black hair and the midnight eyes. But let her beware!"

"You rave!"
"Not I. Let her beware, I say! She has first bid for your complaisance and got it. But will she dare, as I would have dared, to throw over the Mistress, the terrible Mistress? Ha, ha, ha! we shall see, we shall see!" And she forthwith broke away, and flitted off down the passage.

Thinking only of the unmasked spitefulness of the girl, though it would have been well if he had considered her vindictiveness more critically, the detective lost no more time in hastening to his room.

Johann was now once more on guard, but sleeping calmly and phlegmatically at his post, with the renowned firelock of his ancestors between his knees.

Without troubling himself further about his recent adventures or of the proximity of the 'haunted' loft, Nordensterne undressed himself, got into bed, and was soon in a sound, invigorating sleep that remained undisturbed until daylight of the following day.

Hannibal was then the sleeper on guard, the German having been roused up and relieved of his arduous duty at some hour during the night.

"Hullo, Marse Nordensterne!" cried the negro, rubbing his eyes open at about the same time. "You awake, too! Good res' marse, I done hope?"

"Never a better!" was the hearty reply, as the detective turned out. "Sweet is the rest that is unbroken, Hannibal! But are you and Johann going to keep this sentry business up straight along?"

"Long as de ghos' trouble lasts, marse," seriously, with a motion of his woolly head toward the corridor and loft. "We doan't be quite so all-fired 'feard ob dat racket, Dutchy an' me, as we war at de fu'st." And then Hannibal burst into a sudden guffaw.

"What are you laughing at?" smilingly demanded Nordensterne, who, in the course of his rapid but thorough toilette was momentarily exposing his superbly muscular and sinewy physique from the waist up.

"Excuse me, marse, but I se laughin' at yo' bein' one ob de doc's patients, 'long wif Missy Salome. Golly, marse," with a grin; "but yo' am a healthy patient, you am!"

"Oh," good naturedly, "you ought to understand that dodge by this time, Hannibal."

"Golly, marse! an' dat am a fac' dat I done understand it now. Julius Cæsar! big as I be, Marse Nordensterne, I'd want to be t'inkin' twice befo' tacklin' de like ob yo'."

Completing his toilette, the detective stepped to a window, and took his first look out upon the morning.

An involuntary exclamation came from him as he did so.

The snow had ceased falling, and the air was bright and clear, while it seemed to be zero cold; but the accumulations of the snow were amazing.

Far over the land as the eye could reach, it appeared to be at least five feet deep on the level, with hummocky or hill-like drifts that frequently mounted over the apple-tree tops.

The laboriously made paths of the previous day were obliterated, filled in or leveled over.

The river presented a wild and Arctic scene, suggesting the sudden and tumultuous breaking-up of a glacier's stream.

"Humph!" muttered Nordenstern; "a pretty prospect for getting down town to-day! but it must be done."

"Yo' can't do it, marse!" exclaimed the negro, who had stepped to his side. "Dere won't be no trabble dis day, an' de cook done say dat de butcher's meat what we hab in de store-room am gwine to gib out befo' de wagon can git to de house ag'in."

"Let us hope that there'll be bread enough, at all events, old fellow. However, I think I'll manage the trip somehow, and will doubtless only want your help and Johann's in shoveling through as far as the road-gate."

Then he went down to breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNANTICIPATED.

At the breakfast table Dr. Dreamthorpe appeared to have quite regained his philosophical cheerfulness through the means of an excellent night's rest, and congratulated the detective upon having been equally fortunate in that regard.

"The blizzard's work, though," he said, for their talk was now altogether of the weather, "is little short of appalling. In fact, I don't see how or why I kept on under-estimating the storm as I did, wholly exceptional as it has proved."

Nordensterne answered in kind, and then astonished his host scarcely less than Hannibal had been by quietly announcing his intention to essay the down-town trip to headquarters.

"You'll find it an impossibility, I fear, my dear sir," cried the professor.

"Nothing like making the attempt, you know, doctor."

"Ah, yes; and you will succeed if any one can. I suppose you are very desirous of consulting with your chief?"

"That is it."
"Well, I am really afraid that you will not be able to reach him to-day. However, it is probable that the elevated trains will be able to keep running; and I shall myself assume direction of my men in clearing out a path for you as far as the roadway, and further still, if practicable."

"That is kind of you, doctor. But my business down-town is imperative, as you may readily guess; and, so that I get a fair start at any time in the forenoon, I ought to be able to be back here by dusk."

Dreamthorpe looked at him inquiringly.

"With a squad, I hope," he said, "so as to make an end of that accursed river gang forthwith."

Nordensterne nodded.

"It is what I shall ask for," he replied, "though whether I shall obtain the detachment on the spot depends. The knights of the locust must be hard put to it with extra duty by reason of this extraordinary state of the weather."

Half an hour after breakfast, the detective stepped into the laboratory to see if the professor might be ready to superintend the path-clearing work.

He did not find him there, however, and from a scuffling sound that came to him from below and without, he concluded that the work was just beginning on the front piazza.

He was retreating from the room, in order to volunteer his services in the labor in hand, when there was a rustle behind him, together with his name anxiously spoken.

"Oh, Mr. Nordensterne!" exclaimed Salome, who had just stepped in from her apartments, "this can't be true that you are intending to leave us to-day, as Papa Dreamthorpe informed me shortly ago? But you won't make such a hasty attempt—you won't leave me—leave the Sanitarium, I mean—will you?"

The young man had flushed with pleasure.

They were quite alone together, apparently with no danger of being interrupted for some little time at least, and the anxiety of her tone and manner had set his heart to beating fast.

"But I go only to return, miss," he said.

She seemed not a little relieved at this, though still laboring under a strange perturbation he had never noticed in her before.

"Still don't leave me," she faltered, casting

down her eyes, the lovely color coming and going in her perfect complexion, "don't—don't! You see, sir, I—I—"

He ventured to take her hand, with a touch that he strove hard to render merely respectful.

"What is it?" he asked, his deep voice unconsciously sinking, and becoming rich and tender.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" She withdrew her hand and sunk upon the divan. "But I—I am very unhappy! and—and if you go away," averting her eyes, "if you withdraw your support, you know—the sense of security that seems to be with you—I don't know what I shall do!"

"Oh, thank you!" he somehow blurted out. "Your words make me indescribably happy! Or, pardon me, I should say—But, then, I intend to come back by this evening, you know."

"But this dreadful storm! they tell me the entire city is at a standstill—half-smothered under—locomotion suspended."

"I'll get through." The ring of quiet confidence in his tone, which she had become so agreeably used to.

"But if you should not, for all your bravery, your determination, your iron will, Mr. Nordensterne?" with a sudden, desperate collectedness; I—I have been shamming—pretending a heroism that I really do not possess, and that's the truth. Oh, this insecurity, this menace, this excitement! But for your presence here—But as it is," clasping her hands, her voice quivering, "it is wearing me out, wearing me out, wearing me out!" with piteous monotony of repetition.

"Why, in Heaven's name, do you remain here, then, in this desolate and dangerous isolation?" the detective burst out. "Pardon me, miss, but the thought has occurred to me so often, so exasperatingly! You, so rich, so independent, with the best of attendance, medical talent, luxurious accommodations, congenial environments, at your beck and call!"

"Oh, I don't know," helplessly. "Papa Dreamthorpe, he assures me that this hideous seclusion is for the best, and I suppose he is the only one who can cure me. But for that—" she hesitated.

"Speak to me!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Then you do not—you do not—" his hesitation was no less than hers.

"Do not what?" in surprise.

"You must know that the man loves you?"

"Papa Dreamthorpe?"

"Yes."

"I suppose so, of course, in a fatherly, or cousinly way."

"Nonsense!" half-beside himself; "it is as a lover, and a crazily-jealous one, too, though no one could blame him for that."

"What, he?" In mingled bewilderment and terror.

"Yes."

"Heavens! if I thought or was sure of that—" another troubled break.

"Speak! then you do not—you do not—" with similar incompleting, though she understood him now.

"Do not hint at such a thing, sir," she murmured, with a shudder. "Love him? But you cannot know the secret terror with which he at times inspires me."

"Terror?"

"Yes, yes!" lowering her voice still more. "Oh, sir! you do not know, or most likely you do not, but at times, for all his ordinarily middle-aged appearance, there is a look so old, so far away, in his face and eyes, as if he really might have lived on and on, on through the centuries, as is claimed or rumored for him. And at such times—"

But here Nordensterne, as in a dream, was on his knees before her, her hands in his strong grasp, his kisses raining over them, his devotion and his passion finding broken and tumultuous expression in the utterance that is so time-old, so repetitious, and yet never stale, never aught but fresh and joyous and emotional and bewilderment, as with the first lovers in the primal day.

"Salome, I love you, I love you, I love you!" was the substance of all his leaping, confused and torrent-like words. "Oh, turn not away, spurn me not! There is no masked old age, no cheat of nature, but only youth and manhood, and devotion at your feet! I love you, I love you, I love you!"

Then was it still so like a dream, or was she really in his arms, on his breast, with a bewildered, half-delirious little murmurous cry, and with no longer merely her hands, which were now, or seemed to be about his neck, but her lips, her eyelids, her whole blushing face the unresisting, if not the willing, banquet of his hungering lips?

Enough to say that when they parted, a little later, it was with a new and great glory in the lives of both, and Salome was no longer oppressed with the fear that he might not return.

Hastily quitting the laboratory at last, Nordensterne in descending the staircase met Dreamthorpe coming up with an air of having newly and hastily beaten a retreat from the door above for appearance's sake.

At all events, the face that the professor turned toward him was a terrible one, with a still, awful look in it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THROUGH THE BLIZZARD'S SWEEP.

From that strange and awful look in Dreamthorpe's aspect, Nordensterne could not but deem that he had at least glanced in upon the love-scene, which would have been to the final and perhaps wholly anticipated entombment of his own hopes.

But the professor addressed him with assumed cordiality, and even with a forced smile, that invoked his secret sympathy and commiseration for the man.

"We've already," said he, "made such headway in the first path, Nordensterne, that I shouldn't wonder if you'd be able to make a pretty early start after all. Then I've arranged with Johann to hitch both the horses to a round log, and endeavor to pull a trough for you down the road as soon as the gate is reached."

The detective thanked him warmly, and proceeded out to where the men were at work, while the professor went on up-stairs, saying he would rejoin him immediately.

This the latter accordingly did, and a glance at his face, which still wore its hushed, hopeless look underneath an affected buoyancy and cheerfulness of manner, was enough to show that he had not had or sought any interview with Salome.

The depth of the snow was truly phenomenal, the path which the men had got under way from the cleared piazza steps outward toward the gate being banked up on either side far higher than even Hannibal's towering head; while, looking out over the white, glistening levels from the piazza itself, there was never a sign of hedge or fence, many of the smaller fruit trees were all but covered clean out of sight, the taller shade trees of the house-avenue were oddly trunk-shortened, in some instances more than half-way up to their first branches, and the high-pinnacled Norway spruces, larches and hemlocks were craggy, white-shelfed pyramids of the down-pressing, burdening, universal mass.

It was, moreover, zero-cold.

But old Tourette himself, and even the women of the household—fat Celeste, Maida, Greeta—were lending their assistance to the path-making work, with broom, shovel or spade, and all was going on merrily enough, with little pause for the sweat of the exercise to dry chillingly on brow or neck.

Nordensterne lost no time in seizing a snow-shovel and setting to work with the others with a vigor and tirelessness that speedily made themselves individually appreciated.

The Tourettes and the girls were soon back in the house, completely worn out.

But by ten o'clock the path, broad and clean, was cleared down the long avenue, through the driveway gate, and well out into the middle of the boulevard, with a cleared circus there that a team could readily swing round in.

Then, a communicating path having been cleared to the stables, Johann came whipping up with the professor's fine bays hitched to the log.

Both Nordensterne and Hannibal jumped erect upon it behind him, there was a trio of shouts—responded to by men from the neighboring villas, their heads just visible over the toppling levels, engaged in a kindred attempt—and, with a snap of the Prussian's long whip, the team plunged into and through the white bank southward, nervous and impatient from their unaccustomed period of oats and inaction.

Slow enough work, even from the very start.

The animals were almost instantly up to their necks, and, in spite of the intense cold, the snow was already fast packing down of its own weight.

But Nordensterne and the negro were quickly in front of the team, plying their scoops with a will and a vim, and little by little the arduous passage was slowly forced.

Then at the turn into the transverse road they came out into a short course already cleared in front of a rich man's house-grounds, while, from the shouts further on, it was probable that a force was digging toward them from the terminus of the cable-road.

This proved to be the case.

They presently reached the terminus corner, where although the cars were not yet in service, the progress in cleaning the tracks, upon which a multitude of laborers was engaged, was far enough advanced to encourage a pedestrian attempt to reach the 125th street turn, nearly three miles away.

The detective was already overcoated and top-booted for the essay, though less cumbersomely so than when putting the coachman's rubber suit into requisition on the preceding day.

He successively grasped the hand of Johann and Hannibal where they stood, nigh worn out, by the snorting and sweating team, slipping to each a crisp, new bank-note in the operation.

"Good-luck to you till we meet again, friends!" were his parting words. "I may yet have work for you, and of a different kind, ahead."

"Lor' bress an' sabe you, Marse Nordensterne!" exclaimed the negro. "If yo' done lead de way, we is gwine to foller yo', ghos'es or no ghos'es, to de berry las'!"

"Herr, it is der troot mit it all," solemnly

added Johann. "And I vill shtick py you v'ile de musket off mein ancestors, dat vought and plased avay at Waterloo and Lutzen, gan garry a load of puckshot and zlugs!"

Nordensterne again thanked them, and, sending back word to the professor, who had not accompanied them further than the Sanitarium gate, that he would most probably be back in time for dinner, he struck off down the railroad line.

The snow was only being cleared in patches between the rails, with long breast or thigh-deep stretches between, so that it was hard, trying, and often interrupted work.

But he managed to reach the 125th street curve by one o'clock, and thence with comparatively little interruption, (for the great city was now rousing and shaking itself in good earnest, to resume, however imperfectly, the lines of traffic and communication) managed to reach the Elevated Railway Station at the Eighth avenue corner, where, fortunately, he found trains once more running on full time, after a long period of interruption.

Once more swamped in the snow, after quitting the cars at Bleeker street, and that within but a few blocks of the Broadway crossing, he at last reached the Police Headquarters in Mulberry street.

Inspector Byrne happened to be alone in his office when Nordensterne entered, hard-breathed, covered with snow, his hair and mustache whitened to silveriness by the keen frost.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed; "have you come to me all the way from Washington Heights through this weather?"

"Yes, inspector, was the reply. "And my experience yesterday with the storm was even tougher than to-day."

"Well, then, your former surnames will doubtless have to be called in, and give way henceforth to the new one, the Blizzard Detective."

This turned out prophetic, and Nordensterne, who had already exchanged words with certain of his brother professionals on his way in through the building, found himself laughingly addressed as the Blizzard Detective before quitting it, and the name stuck to him while he remained in the profession.

"Oh, bother the nick-names, inspector!" was his response, while divesting himself of his cap and overcoat. "There are other things to think of now."

"You are here to report?"

"Yes."

"Let's have what you've got to say at once, then. Fortunately, I am at leisure to hear you, though the force, as a body, are simply worked to death, by reason of this overwhelming storm."

Nordensterne complied.

"Just as I thought!" commented Byrne, when he had finished. "A tissue of carefully prepared jugglery and claptrap from beginning to end! Eh, Karl?"

"Doubtless," was the reply. "But with the exception of the veiled woman's extraordinary hypnotic or mesmeric power, as I think you will allow."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," reflectively. "There must be something genuinely existent in that, or it would not have received the dispassionate recognition that it has from scientists. But you have done well, Karl, remarkable well!"

"A thousand thanks, inspector!" And the young man's dark cheeks flushed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON TIME.

"By the way," continued the inspector, "there's a bit of information come this way that, oddly enough, supports one point of your investigation as now developed, Karl."

"What is it, inspector?"

"That outlandish chap, Koffsky, who so persistently appeals to the 'Jehovah of the Humans,' and all that sort of thing!"

"The rascal! What of him, inspector?"

"A stray leaf from his past history, that is all. He must have committed bigamy when he made himself your fair Miss Haworth's step-father."

"Ha! like enough."

"Yes; he had been married years previously to a Miss Natchina Ripski, whom he deserted in Hungary, together with a young daughter, to come to this country."

"Oho! yes; Therese's sister, Natchka, Greeta's mother, and doubtless the victim of the railroad disaster whose remains Dreamthorpe identified as his wife's by mistake!"

"Doubtless, by the report you have just made to me. But by mistake? Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, inspector, howsoever the professor may now suspect the real truth, as prompted by me."

"Good! And what brings you here especially on this day, Karl?"

"I want a squad in civilian dress, and without delay."

Byrne shook his head.

"But," pleaded Nordensterne, "we can now make a clean sweep of the entire house-boat gang, while a single day's delay may give them

the alarm, or cause them to scatter as the snow and ice melt."

"Can't help it, Karl. The overwork called forth by this deep snow was altogether unanticipated, and not a man can be spared, at least for the next twenty-four hours."

"But don't be down-hearted. That gang will remain snow and ice-bound longer than you premise. I feel sure of it, nor is it likely that they will take any sudden alarm, so far as I can see."

"At all events, with this zero weather continuing, there can be no immediate break-up of the suburban blockade, by river or land."

Nordensterne felt his disappointment to be somewhat mitigated by the confidence with which these words were uttered.

"I suppose," he said, "you admit the necessity of a squad, inspector, if a clean sweep of the miscreants is to be attempted?"

"Of course, of course! and a squad of good men at that."

"What is the earliest I may look for them, do you think?"

"To-morrow evening at dusk, or a little later," was the reply, after a thoughtful pause.

"All right," Nordensterne said as he arose. "I shall depend on them."

"Do so, Karl, and I'll send you a bunch of as good men from hereabouts as you would be able to select for yourself. Men, too, who will be instructed to place themselves absolutely at your command, so that not a bit of the chief credit shall be lost to you."

"Thank you, kindly, inspector!"

"But you won't think of making the return trip before you have fairly rested yourself, Karl?"

"Yes, or as soon as I can get a square meal. I am due at the Sanitarium for the regulation dinner hour, according to promise, and I'm bound to be 'on time.'"

The inspector accordingly grasped his hand in wishing him a Godspeed, and the detective hurried away.

The return trip was less trying than the harsh experience of the morning, though only so by comparison.

But, not to linger too long on irrelevant particulars, he accomplished it on time, though all but exhausted by the strain, arriving at the Sanitarium a few minutes preceding the dinner hour.

Dreamthorpe greeted him with congratulations, that were artificially hearty, at all events, the Tourettes and the young women, together with Johann, came thronging into the hall with manifest delight as he entered it, and Hannibal, who had skipped up-stairs, was awaiting him in his room to assist him at his toilette as a special attention.

"Gorry, marse!" exclaimed the honest fellow, his black face a garden of white teeth-husking smiles and grins: "it really am yo' own self safe back ag'in, an' no mistake!"

"It looks very like it, Hannibal," replied the detective, with a dead-weariness that he couldn't wholly disguise. "I wonder if there might be a warm bath ready for a fellow."

"All ready, Marse Nordensterne! I took keer ob dat. An' look ober dere!" he pointed to the detective's best suit laid out and carefully brushed in the firelight over the side of the bed. "I took the liberty, marse, ob going froo wif your wahdrobe, an' gittin' eberyting in applepie ordah. An' dere am your fresh underwear, too, toastin' by de fiah. For you see, Marse Nordensterne, I jess done knowed dat yo' would be back on time, eff yo' war still alive an' breavin' on top ob de airth!"

But best, most grateful of all was the masked greeting, the swift covert look of devouring love and thanksgiving, that Salome had in store for him when he finally descended to the dining-room, where the professor and she were keeping the dinner waiting for him.

Then, too, there was her quick, though vailed, solicitude and anxiety as her eyes rested on his face, and noted the weary, exhausted look which neither his hasty bath nor toilette could completely dissipate.

However, both lovers felt the importance of being thoroughly on their guard—though exactly why any concern should be felt as to Dreamthorpe's knowing the entire truth, neither of them would have been able to say—and, after the first natural congratulations on the young lady's part, they circumspectly abstained from addressing any more than the merest civilities to one another.

Nordensterne's trip down-town was, of course, the staple topic of conversation, and in this the professor manifested, or seemed to manifest, the liveliest interest, for him.

"Of course," said the professor, when they were quitting the table. "you will accompany us into the laboratory. Or are you too tired?"

"Too fagged out altogether," replied Nordensterne, but managing to give Salome a melting look as they separated.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
PROGRESS.

NORDENSTERNE had sacrificed his feelings to prudence in no ordinary degree, as may well be imagined, in declining to accept yet another hour

of Salome's sweet society, if even in Dreamthorpe's presence.

But he really was outworn, and, after putting on a dressing-gown, he settled himself before his fire, book in hand.

Later on, Hannibal put in an appearance.

He stood silently scratching his woolly head for some seconds, in evident hesitation, and then said:

"Marse Nor'nsterne, yo' does want we 'uns—dat is, Johann an' me—to keep on standin' gahd hyar, doesn't yo'?"

"Why, yes, I should like it kept up for a night or two longer," replied the detective, surprised. "But why do you ask? I thought it was an understood thing with both of you."

"Yes; so it war, marse, an' willin' enough, too. But—"

"But what?"

"Well, marse, you see, Marse Dreamt'orpe, be—" Another break.

"Ah, I see," with a sudden hardness of tone. "Mr. Dreamthorpe has come to think otherwise, eh?"

"Not quite dat, maybe, marse; but he jes' done say dat he t'ought it war de height ob foolishness an'—an' obercautiousness—yes, dat war de word—unless yo' done insist on it."

Nordensterne flushed.

"Foolishness and over-cautiousness, eh?" he repeated.

"Dat were what de purfessor said, marse."

"Humph!" And then, with sudden pointedness: "Did he say so in Miss Haworth's presence, Hannibal?"

"Yes, sah. It war only a few minutes ago, an' de young lady war dere."

"I see. And what do you and Johann think about it?"

"Oh, marse, we'uns done want to stan' by yo', ob course!"

"And the professor is good enough to leave it to me?"

"Yes, marse; dat am 'bout de size ob de woodpile."

"Good, then, my man! I prefer that the guard shall be kept up. Tell Johann my decision, and start in as soon as you please; for I am already pretty sleepy."

Hannibal brightened up on the spot, and he at once started out to communicate the decision to Johann.

"Over-cautiousness, indeed!" muttered Nordensterne, grinding the phrase between his teeth. "Why didn't he hint at over-timidity at once? Curse the infatuated old fool! could he have thought to generate a slur on my courage in her mind, and after what I have gone through in this house?"

Then a new and grave suspicion came into his thoughts.

Might the professor's jealous rage prove so overpowering as to induce him even to join in the veiled woman's plot for accomplishing his, the detective's destruction?—ay, even the destruction of Salome herself, rather than see her a rival's prize?

However, the suspicion was not seriously considered as yet; and Hannibal now reappearing to take up the primary watch, with Johann's ancestral firelock in his hands, Nordensterne lost no more time in getting into bed, where he was fast asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

It was the profound, heavy sleep of physical exhaustion, even more absolutely so than the Blizzard Detective's recuperative slumber of the previous night.

This time when he awoke, greatly invigorated and refreshed, the gaslight and fire-glow of the room were paling in the slow brightening of the new dawn, whose reflected streaks could be seen on the sky through one of the westward-looking windows.

Nordensterne stretched himself, gave a great, satisfied yawn, and then looked about him.

The first object he saw seemed natural and conventional enough.

It was the relief-guard Johann at his post, apparently sound asleep in his easy-chair, as was to be expected, with the gun between his knees.

The next thing he saw brought him flying into a sitting and staring posture on the side of the bed, as if thrown up by springs.

It was the barred and guarded door standing wide open!

Yes; and the chief entrance opposite to it, leading into the main building was also open, indicating a perhaps recent passage through the room in the direction of the laboratory.

Swiftly and silently he crossed the floor to Johann's side.

The man was not sleeping naturally, but tranced, spellbound, sense-chained, hypnotized, or something of the sort; the body rigid, the head back, the honest, stupid face upturned, with open mouth, closed eyes, and with scarcely perceptible respiration.

The detective then glanced at the door.

The secret of its having been forced was instantly apparent to his practiced eye.

Not only the door proper, but its entire framework, top and sides, were on unsuspected hinges, and the whole affair, cross-bar included, had been swung open upon them, leaving the entrance to the wing corridor a gaping void.

Then there was the well-remembered, soft, melodiously terrible laugh, combined with the click of the opening and shutting the door at the further end.

A mere outline glimpse of the stately, gliding figure, and it had disappeared into the loft beyond.

Nordensterne started back, his hand to his brow.

This time the trouble of disturbing or hypnotizing himself had not been thought worth while. Salome's apartments had doubtless been revisited—the night-draught most likely again tampered with—and by way of the laboratory!

To assume certain indispensable garments was the work of an expeditiousness on the part of Nordensterne, that would have done credit to a prize New York fireman on the fire-alarm jump.

Then, without rousing the German, or taking thought of aught else left behind, he rushed noiselessly out of the room in the direction of the laboratory.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STILL SAFE.

As he had anticipated, the entrance to the laboratory had also been left open, the terrible intruder not having taken the trouble to close it behind her.

Heavens! and perhaps after accomplishing the full measure of her plotting malice in the death of Salome?

It was an all but paralyzing thought, but with the detective—the lover-detective—was fortunately but an incentive to increased alertness and promptness of action.

Hurrying into the laboratory, which was perfectly dark, save for the stray dawn-beams that stole spectrally in by its one window, the detective noiselessly lighted and turned up the gas.

The long room was tenantless, but for his own presence.

Then flinging back the *portiere*, he slipped into Miss Haworth's corridor, and was kneeling before the communicating door—which Greeta had promised to guard from within—amid the comparative obscurity of the inner extremity.

But he had not forgotten his electric breastpin.

A touch caused it to fill the corridor with its brilliant white light.

Then a brief examination of the lock, and he drew a long breath of immense relief.

The strong bolt of the lock was undisturbed in its fastening, and he somehow at once felt confident that, if the whilom intruder had made an attempt upon it, she had been baffled.

Returning to the laboratory, he extinguished his bosom-light, and paused for a moment in thought.

Directly across the room was the *portiere* covering the entrance to Dr. Dreamthorpe's rooms, into which the detective had never yet penetrated, having never received an invitation to do so.

Now, however, he drew aside the hanging, without hesitation, entered a short passage similar to the one opposite, and, again turning on the light of his breastpin, proceeded to the door at the end of it.

It was not locked, and passing over the threshold, he found himself in a large, plainly-furnished double room.

He paused, listening for the breath of a sleeper, but the hush of the apartment was unbroken.

Still, there was a bed in the inner room, through the half-parted hangings of which he made out the draped outlines of a recumbent figure.

Approaching guardedly, so as to shelter the occupant's eyes from the full luster of his breast-light, he looked within.

And there he saw Dr. Dreamthorpe fast and sound asleep—there was no shamming about it, as he satisfied himself at a glance—but sleeping in such a way as he had never witnessed in mortal man before.

Apparently absolutely breathless, it in that degree resembled the sleep of death, or of a death-seeming trance; and yet the complexion and attitude were perfectly natural, and he satisfied himself that it was the professor's accustomed form of somnolency, however abnormal it might have seemed in another.

Respiration there indeed was, too, save that it was only perceptible on scrutiny, while the sleeper was evidently otherwise in his habitual health.

A glance had been sufficient to assure Nordensterne that the veiled woman's visit to the laboratory could not have been with Dreamthorpe's knowledge or collusion.

Then something in the slumberer's placid face held him momentarily enthralled.

What was it? A placid look, a look of agedness, a suggestion, no less pronounced than indescribable, of an unconscious or unmasked succumbing to years upon years, cycles upon cycles, that during wakefulness were haughtily held at bay, cheated of their natural conquest and splendor!

At all events, it was such a look that the detective turned away with something akin to pity and dread.

"Who," he thought, "who would knowingly overmaster death, change, decay, the end of all, if indeed this strange being has overmastered it, at such a price, the hoarded accretion of a mummied past, the death-in-life of isolation from one's fellows, and from the live, throbbing world that lives but that it must die, and dies that it shall live again? And to think of Salome having been deemed the prospective prey of such a moral vampirism!"

He hurried away, still noiselessly and yet more swiftly than he had come.

But he must be assured in some way, and absolutely as to Salome's safety.

"To think of invading the sanctity of her rest again, even had the way been unbarred to him, was not even a suggestion in his loyal mind.

But Greeta!

Could he only communicate secretly with her?

He again approached the inner door of Salome's corridor, and even tried it, while giving a slight cough.

To his surprise and satisfaction, the door was instantly opened from within, and Greeta, fully dressed, was before him.

"This time I knew it was you," she murmured, following him out into the laboratory, after a significant sign to the effect that her mistress was safe. "When you were there before I feared that it might be *she* again."

"Ha! the veiled woman?"

"Yes."

"Then she tried to silently force that door back yonder?"

"Or to have me open it for her—and failed. Mr. Nordensterne, I have been true to my trust."

"God bless you for it, Greeta!"

And then he hurriedly related his own experience.

"But wait!" he suddenly interrupted himself with. "There is the other communicating door—my own room now completely unguarded!"

He was about to hurry back to his apartment when she quieted his alarm with a few words.

"No," she said, "baffled here, the Mistress will make no other attempt now. Did you not catch a glimpse of her retreat? Besides, see: it is nearly broad day. Yes, Mr. Nordensterne," in the same quiet, spiritless tone as at first, "I have been true to my trust."

He now remarked that Greeta was greatly changed.

There was no longer the fire or snap to her fine eyes, a profound seriousness was in her air, her manner; and a strange stillness or mechanicalness seemed to have fallen upon her comeliness and her looks.

"You have, indeed, been true, Greeta!" was his somewhat embarrassed reply. And then he added: "How enraged she must have been at finding herself baffled of your assistance!"

"The Mistress?"

"Yes."

"Oh, not greatly," in a matter-of-fact tone. "She would have been more or less prepared for it. Maida!" And she smiled both sadly and contemptuously.

"Ha!" The Swiss girl's spitefulness and implied threats came rushing back upon him. "She would have guessed, then, your compact with me, and betrayed it?"

An indifferent inclination of the pretty head in assent, and then she merely held out her hand.

"I return to my post, Herr Nordensterne," she said, lowering her eyes. "If anything should happen to me, you will perhaps sometimes remember that—that I was devoted to your interests and *hers*?" with a just perceptible motion of the head toward Salome's apartments.

"No?"

"Will I?" exclaimed the young man, deeply moved. "But nothing is going to happen, or shall happen, to you. Oh, if I could do something in return for your fidelity, and at once!"

There was a single passionate, but hopeless, flash up to him out of the dark, Gypsy eyes; and, taking her head between his hands, he gravely kissed her brow.

Even Salome could not have been jealous of that kiss. It was such as he might have given to a sister, had he had one.

Then, with an inarticulate murmur, a sort of broken little cry of gratefulness and pain she was gone.

He would have gladly questioned her as to the contradictoriness of the antagonism between her and Maida, combined with their whilom devotion to the veiled woman's plot, but it was too late, though he reflected that another time would answer.

Had he but foreseen that those dark eyes had looked into his, with their pained, lifeful flash, for the last time!

But he did not, and so retreated hurriedly to his room, full of the thought that he was now doubtless on the threshold of his triumph.

CHAPTER XL.

WAITING.

JOANN was just beginning to rouse himself out of his trance-like condition when Nordensterne re-entered his chamber.

Before the recovery was quite complete, the

latter restored the opening into the wing-corridor to its original aspect of security, the cross-bar in place again, and then assisted the German to a return of consciousness with a vigorous but good-natured shake.

"Hallo!" he cried; "is this the way you guard my slumber, Johann? Here am I up and dressed, and you none the wiser!"

Johann clutched his musket more tightly between his knees, and looked blinking about him in stupid wonder.

"What! have I really slept, then, Herr Nordensterne?" he exclaimed.

"Well, I should say so!"

"Strange, herr, strange! for it was not like sleep—no, not von bit!"

"What was it like, then?" curiously.

"Vell, I gant tell much," and Johann scratched his head dubiously. "Somet'ings seemed to sudden give vay mit my head on der inside. Den I knows nodings, and just before I knows nodings it seem zat de door swing vide open—efer so vide—v'ile zomebody pass into der room here."

"A dream, Johann, a dream! You see for yourself that everything is as it was. Go to Madame Tourette now for your early-morning coffee, and you'll forget all about it before you have fed up your horses."

Johann accordingly took himself off, gun on shoulder, but still wagging his big head somewhat doubtfully.

A few minutes later, Nordensterne went out to take an observation of the weather.

The cold was moderating rapidly, and the snow, which had been more than waist-deep on the level, was already tracked down at least one-third by its own weight.

The sunrise was clouded, but with no further indications of snow.

"The beginning of the thaw!" muttered the detective to himself. "But if the squad shall only be able to put in an appearance by this evening, as promised, I ask for nothing better."

It being still long before the breakfast hour, he went into the dining-room for a cup of coffee and a biscuit.

Maida Berlioz waited upon him, with as colorless and unruffled serenity as if he were altogether a new-comer in the place, while both Alphonse and his fat wife ventured to look in from the kitchen for his opinion about the weather.

"I rejoice that monsieur thinks there will be a thaw," said Tourette, whose foreign accent was scarcely perceptible. "We are safe as it is, but with a few more inches of the villainous snow our wine-cellar would be flooded quite."

His wife rolled up her watery eyes, her pink little nose in the air, at the mere thought of such a vinous calamity.

"Heaven forbid!" she murmured; "but then," with a naive little air of consolation, "much of the brandies and other bottled stuffs are, fortunately, above-ground in the butlery."

Her spouse's lantern jaws came together with the snap of a flytrap, as his quick, sarcastic glance fell upon her, as much as to say:

"No danger of your forgetting that, my dear; and, still more fortunately, I'll take care that you don't pilfer the key to it again in a hurry."

Later on, as Maida was flitting out of the room, Nordensterne surprised one glance from her, that seemed to have something of malignant exultation in it; but that was all, and he thought no more about it—not at that time, at all events.

At breakfast the professor put in a composed and courteous appearance, and then, to his surprise no less than Nordensterne's, Salome also appeared.

"What!" cried the young man; "you must, indeed, be improving. Up to this time such a thing as her coming down to breakfast had not been thought of.

"Yes," with a guarded look, for the professor was furtively watching them both, "I am, indeed, feeling more myself than for a long time, thank you, Mr. Nordensterne. But that is not the only reason for my venture of this morning."

"The change will be good for you, Salome," observed Dreamthorpe, calmly. "But what do you hint at?"

"Greeta seems to be ill. I do not know what to make of her."

And, as they took their seats at table, she went on to give some of the particulars.

Soon after sunrise it seemed, the girl had awokened her young mistress to complain of a distressing pain in the heart, together with a strange giddiness, a nervous terror as of some invisible menace, and so on.

So Salome had insisted upon her lying down in her own room, and had even performed her toilette unaided in consequence.

"I'll go up to her presently," said Professor Dreamthorpe, briefly. "But it will never do for you, Salome, to have the girl about you, if even but temporarily prostrated!"

"And pray why won't it do, Pap—doctor?" demanded the young lady.

"Oh, it merely will not do in your present state."

"But my state is good enough, and therefore it will have to do, my dear cousin," quite firm-

ly. "Greeta shall not, at all events, be sent off to a hospital, as poor Rose was—not if I know it."

Nordensterne looked at her animated face with secret admiration, there was so much simple humanity in her words.

"Ah, well!" observed Dreamthorpe, temporizing, "we shall see. But we must not forget that the French maid was doubtless far differently affected."

"I should say so, cousin!" responded Salome, dryly. "And I'll see to it personally, too, depend on it, that Greeta is not plied with the same sort of poison that carried off Rose Planchez—that is, if I can help it. And now, doctor," with amiable irresponsibility, "you may give me another bit of the chicken, with plenty of the mushroom gravy."

The professor obeyed, though looking decidedly uncomfortable, for he had never dreamed of Miss Haworth treasuring a similar suspicion to that of the detective as to the cause of the young Frenchwoman's death.

However, this he evidently set down as only another instance of the rapid intimacy that had grown up between the pair; and, while making no outward sign, he probably cursed the hour again and again that he had brought them together.

The repast was soon over, and then, with a swift parting look for her lover, and after ordering some special delicacies for her "patient," as she already spoke of her ailing maid, Salome hurried away to resume her ministrations.

"A case of the blind leading the blind, or of the sick healing the sick!" commented the professor, with more temper than he often exhibited, when she was gone. "Moreover, a young lady of Miss Haworth's position to take on that way over a trifling indisposition in—in a waiting-maid!"

"Still, doctor," observed Nordensterne, guardedly, "it may be a more serious indisposition than you imagine. And I do hope—"

"Oh, I'll look into the case promptly, my dear sir. Never fear as to that. Still—however, it doesn't matter."

Later on, in answer to the detective's inquiries, he reported the girl as having suffered from a nervous attack; but that she was already much better, with an inclination to make up for her previous night's loss of sleep, after which she ought to be quite herself again.

CHAPTER XLI.

AN ALARM.

THE professor's manner had undergone such a decided, if not ominous, change by this time that the detective, who was more and more impressed with the feeling that things were rapidly approaching a crisis, resolved to be more closely and suspiciously watchful of his moods and actions than ever.

However, the denouement was approaching with more fateful and irresistible rapidity than even he could have any idea of, and various unforeseen interruptions were destined to step in between him and the more critical espionage that he proposed.

In the first place, Dr. Dreamthorpe received a professional visit, which could not be intruded upon, and which lasted well on to the lunch hour, while Salome was necessarily no less inaccessible by reason of her devotion to her maid.

Then, directly after lunch, and in spite of the still all but impossible nature of the roads, the young lady was at last the recipient of a long-threatened visit from her lawyer and man of affairs.

This necessitated a long private consultation in the drawing-room, which threatened to be interminable, and at which Dreamthorpe was also present, so that Nordensterne could not avoid, in his impatience and suspense, a certain feeling of forlornness and banishment that was all the more bitter, if unreasonable, from his general sense of the danger that was in the air.

At last, as the afternoon wore away, he could stand it no longer, and determined on some sort of immediate action as a relief.

As a first step to this end, he went up into the laboratory, where he chanced to encounter Hannibal, who had been looking after the professor's sleeping apartment.

"How is Greeta now?" he demanded.

"She war fas' asleep," was the reply, "when Marm Tourette went in an hour ago."

"Ah! Madame Celeste is then sitting up with the girl in Miss Haworth's absence?"

"Yes, marse."

"And not Maida?"

"Not she! She, ce Swiss gal, done want to, I beleebé, but I heerd Miss Haworth forbid her eber to come inter dis room. It war jess' as de young lady war gwine down to de parlor, an' when Marm Tourette had been called up, marse."

The detective felt somewhat relieved at this.

"You are not engaged just now, Hannibal?"

"Not if yo' done want me, marse."

"Get Johann's blunderbuss again, then. I want you to mount guard in my room, while I take a trip out-doors."

"What, in de daytime, marse?"

"Yes; it will most likely prove unnecessary, but I don't want to omit the least precaution."

"All right, Marse Nordensterne, I'se yo' man."

And then, seeing the negro posted on guard accordingly, the detective, after a few personal preparations, slipped out of the house by the kitchen porch, and started down the path through the snow, in the determination to make another expedition to the robber fastness in anticipation of more vigorous measures later on.

Though the cold had greatly moderated, it was still keen, and the afternoon was uncommonly dark and lowering.

In fact, the air was exceptionally obscure, and with a fog rapidly forming on the river to make it more so.

But this was all the better for the detective's purpose, as it would help to render his movements more secret, and at the same time more expeditious.

At the end of the cleared path, his former course down the slope had been guttered down almost to the frozen ground beneath by a chance rivulet of thaw-water that had followed it throughout the day.

This rendered his progress incomparably less difficult than before, and he was quickly more than two-thirds down, with the snow-bank at still more than four feet high on either side, and the insweeping fog from the river serving to cloak his movements closer and closer with every rod of the descent.

He again came upon the corpse of the frozen Italian—"poor Carpi," as Koffsky had called him—though it was now fallen from its erect, staring attitude, and lying at its length, still stiff, stark, and partly covered by the snow that had caved in around and over it.

Then he reached the apple-tree, whose fork had formed his first lookout over the tempestuous waste.

A few paces farther on, he again turned off along the base of the hill toward the buried shanty.

His whilom tunnel from this point was now but a deep, trough-like path through the subsiding drift, icy, slippery and hummocky along the bottom, from the action of the thaw and subsequent frost.

But he presently made his way to the shanty, which now showed its roof no less than its chimney above the hillside snows.

There was no sound from within, so he ventured to enter.

He found no one there, though there were evidences enough of the place having been numerously tenanted from time to time since his former visit.

He had scarcely looked well around him before he heard steps approaching from over the snow without.

A peep then showed him two men coming up from the direction of the house-boat, making their way toilsomely through the debris of what had been the snow-tunnel.

Almost simultaneously with this discovery, he distinguished muffled voices back of the subterranean entrance which he had found it impossible to force.

He was caught between two fires.

He threw a swift glance around for that concealment which might doubtless prove indispensable to the ultimate success of the grand robber-netting coup that he had in contemplation.

A couple of the long benches were standing on end, leaned against the wall, in a corner of the room.

The next instant he was behind them, and none too soon.

The muffled voices had grown more distinct.

Now that formidable door swung outward—misled by appearances, he had sought to force it inward, which was the simple explanation, in whole or in part, of his exasperating non-success—with no perceptible preliminary manipulation of the lock, as easily as if hinged on oil, and the veiled woman in black entered.

She was followed—could it be? yes—by none other than the Hungarian, Koffsky—yes, and Koffsky, too, in an agony of expostulation and excitement, noticeably excessive even in him.

"My daughter—tell me what you would do with my daughter!" he cried, clasping his hands entreatingly. "Mistress, I demand that she shall be unharmed! Your own niece, too! think of that. Ow!"

Immovable as a bronze image to his hysterical words, she bent her head to listen to the approaching steps.

Pale with real terror, or anxiety, Koffsky, who was fairly prancing in his excitement, continued his wild beseechings.

"My Greeta—my child!" he screamed. "Mistress, I demand her of you! Give her back to me! God of the Universe! would you dare—"

"Peace!" contemptuously from behind the veil, and with a grandly menacing gesture.

"She is a traitress, hence she dies!"

"My Greeta, my child a traitress? Never! Mistress, it cannot be. I swear—"

"Peace, I say! The girl is already on the accursed detective's side. I have it from Maida, besides other proofs. She dies!"

Here the two men from without entered the shanty, stamping their feet to warm them and shake off the adhering ice and snow.

CHAPTER XLII.

DARK WORK.

BOTH the new-comers were rough, dangerous-looking men, booted and fur-capped, and in the larger one, who was of all but gigantic build, the detective thought he recognized the boating companion of the big Swede whom he had killed in self-defense at the gangway of the house-boat.

"You have followed my instruction as to the traitress?" demanded the "Mistress," turning to them with an imperious but eager movement.

Koffsky meanwhile looked and listened, still clasping his hands, apparently in an increased agony of suspense.

The larger of the ruffians answered in the affirmative, while both inclined their heads in the profoundest respect.

Thereupon the Hungarian set up a fresh exhortatory howl.

"He is the fool of a father!" exclaimed the woman. "Seize him!"

Instantly the unfortunate Koffsky was pounced upon and rendered less annoying by the men, with the utmost promptness and no little brutality.

"That will do," indifferently, as she moved toward the door. "Fetch him along. He has been useful to us, but it may be expedient to dispose of him in short order, also."

They followed obediently, dragging and hustling the now despairing but still wailing Hungarian with them, and all disappeared.

Nordensterne slipped out from his concealment, and opened the door wide enough to peer after them.

They were following the tunnel-ruin path straight out toward the railroad and the house-boat.

What could it mean?

Could Greeta already be in the power of the vailed demoness's vengeance?

From what he knew of the situation at the Sanitarium, it seemed hardly possible—indeed, altogether incredible.

However, for the moment he was in a whirl of indecision and embarrassment.

Should he track these miscreants on to their floating fastness, according to his original intention, or retrace his course in all expedition to assure himself of Greeta's present safety?

The girl's brief devotion to him, so generously and self-sacrificingly on the heels of a confessed passion which she knew not only to be hopeless, but resigned for a rival's claims, assumed in his thoughts the recognition and pathetic aspect that it deserved.

He thought of her youth, her dark beauty, even her ill-governed, wasted love, with the regretful gentleness that he might have felt in the case of a savage maiden, a lovely, untutored child of nature, whose wild, sweet love had passed into his unwilling keeping.

But indecision was never more than an instant's weakness with the Blizzard Detective.

No, no; she could not yet be in actual danger—there would not have been time for that.

And so, with this hasty and erroneous impression at last as the verdict of his disputing thoughts, he slipped out of the shanty, and set about tracking the vailed woman and her satellites to their riverside den.

He had waited long enough to give them a good start—indeed, until they were wholly out of sight down the irregular snow-walled path, over which, moreover, the insweeping fog from the water was now settling in milk-white, fluctuating gusts, or waves, while the darkening cloudiness overhead continued to deepen.

The railroad line was by this time thoroughly digged out clear, and as he neared the crossing an up Express train tore past, amid down-beaten pennants of smoke and steam, and showering spray-dust of powdering snow from the white, still towering banks on either side.

At the extremity of what had been the snow-tunnel on the further side, a momentary disappearance of the mist enabled Nordensterne to distinguish the woman and her companions crossing the house-boat's deck—now cleared of its snow-covering—by the gangway from the outer side, and disappearing within.

Then forward again under cover of the shrouding mist, through the snow, over the ice, and presently he was at the gangway steps.

The cleared water passage reaching out into the stream was there, as before, and close at hand the row-boat, too, closely lashed to the hulk's side.

He paused, listening.

Not a sound within, save a confused murmuring of deadened voices from the main living-room forward; nor from without, save the river's deep-toned sweep, rather felt than heard, the brittle clashing of the mid-stream running ice, and the occasional cry of an invisible gull, cuffing the fog with its wild, wide wings.

His eye again resting on the yawl, a sudden determination possessed him.

Lightly stepping into her, he examined her bottom carefully.

It was as he had hoped from the craft's worn and much repaired appearance.

An old breach in her bottom forward had been repaired, not by replacing the injured

plank, but by rounding the hole, and then filling it in with a stout plug.

This he managed to extract, by patient and vigorous manipulation, and then, before much water could enter by the aperture he stopped it up with his handkerchief and one of his gloves, which would doubtless serve to keep out the water temporarily, or until the boat should be put to vigorous use, when the chance would be a spouting surprise for its inmates.

"There!" thought Nordensterne, self-complacently; "it is as well to look ahead for possible emergencies."

He then threw the plug away, and stepped back upon the ice.

At the same instant there was a hoarse, challenging exclamation, a figure seemed to leap down from the hulk's deck, to loom up gigantically in the fog, and something, magnified by the obscurity to the apparent size of a telegraph pole, was whirled over its head preparatory to a down-sweep upon his defenseless head.

Then a swift wavering of the mist, and the shadowy assailant was distinguished as the colossal Swede, perhaps the brother of the ruffian who had ventured upon a similarly dastard assault, to his destruction.

Evading the blow by a lightning-like ducking movement, Nordensterne, knife already in hand, glided forward under the fellow's guard with the noiseless, bolt-like fury of the bulldog's spring.

There was another hoarse exclamation cut short in its utterance, a fleeting gleam in the mist, and the giant, like his whilom companion and predecessor in Fate's subtle mesh, was dead on his back, with the detective's knife in his heart.

Hastily rising, the victor again bent his head toward the hulk, listening intently.

No; not even the ghost of an alarm from within.

Disposing of the body, as in the former instance, by thrusting it into the clear water-space, whence the swift current speedily carried it out of sight under the opposite ice, Nordensterne slipped up the gangway, and entering the hulk as before, noiselessly passed through the intervening compartments to his former peep-hole into the larger cabin forward.

As at the former visit, the interior was crowded with the ruffian crew, not one of whom seemed to have the slightest suspicion of the spying eye that was upon them.

But now, their woman leader having entered, with her remaining attendant and the captive Koffsky, but a few minutes previously, they were all on their feet, uncovered and in attitudes of the deepest respect, before her.

She had evidently just finished addressing some cheering words to them, for as the detective took up his secret observation, they suddenly made a mysterious sign in concert with the left hand and arm, and burst into a sort of guarded cheer.

The woman responded by a gratified but still imperious gesture.

"It is well," she said, the lustrous blackness of her veil trembling shimmeringly around her as she drew herself up to her full, commanding stature. "Patience and fidelity for but a little period longer, my braves, and I will be able to command your final dispersion as an organization, each with a small fortune at his individual disposal—ay, and perhaps no later than this very night. Look to the Hungarian now. Well as he may have served us in the past, his whining plea for the life that his traitress-daughter has forfeited, according to our code, alone places him under our suspicion and distrust."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A DISAPPEARANCE.

WITH the old rippling melodiousness, and yet with the unmistakable ring of a despotic command had the words rippled out from the invisible lips behind the mysterious veil.

Scarcely had she concluded when the miserable Koffsky, who, with his bruised face and disordered garments, had stood by with clasped hands, in a cowed, despairing attitude, the picture of mental and emotional wretchedness, burst out into a series of dolorous, protesting howls, in which his characteristic "Ows" were hysterically mixed up with appeals to the Ruler of the universe, the "humans," and the like.

But he was quickly pounced upon, shaken into silence, and then hustled out of the sight, while the vailed woman moved toward a door in the further bulkhead, that doubtless communicated with the last compartment in the very stern of the bulk.

It was obsequiously opened for her by the mulatto who had whistled for the dancing on the occasion of the detective's primary visit.

There was a glimpse of a comparatively luxurious, not to say gorgeous, interior beyond, then the door closed behind her, and she was gone.

Nordensterne was once more the prey to conflicting and indecisive speculations.

Was Greeta already the woman's prisoner—perhaps her victim, as well—or was her kidnapping still what seemed more likely, a measure in contemplation?

Nothing that he had overheard, either here or

in the shanty, could be construed into solving the question for him one way or the other.

However, if the girl might be already a helpless captive, awaiting the demoness's vengeance, there in the bulk, not the less would the detective find himself powerless to aid her, single-handed against that ruffian crew.

Accordingly, he lost no time in beating a retreat.

Pausing at the shanty, he again entered it, in the hope that the door to the subterranean passage, now that he was wiser than before, might prove less obdurate than on the previous occasion.

But, much to his chagrin, the crowbars from which he had formerly selected an implement had disappeared, and there was nothing else that would answer his purpose in a fresh attempt upon the door.

However, he satisfied himself that, if properly attacked, it would no longer prove invincible, while the corresponding door in the cellar of the north wing was probably susceptible to the same conditions.

He now lost no more time in hurrying up the hill on his return to the Sanitarium.

Both mists and overhead-clouds had deepened in density till it was with difficulty that objects could be distinguished a dozen yards off, and it was now but five o'clock in the afternoon.

As he made his way pantingly up the hill, his thoughts were more and more preoccupied with his uncertainty as to Greeta's fate or welfare, until at last he could think of nothing else.

His anxiety was prophetic in its character.

As he approached the back porch, he heard a carriage—doubtless the conveyance that had brought Salome's legal adviser from the city—driving away from the front.

Then, as he entered the hall at the rear, he saw Salome hastily ascending the stairs, though she stopped and beckoned upon catching sight of him.

"Karl, my beloved!" she murmured, in soft tones, which were yet more than a reward for his forlornness of the afternoon; "where can you have been? But never mind; you can tell me later on. That stupid business man of mine! he is only just gone. I must hasten back to my patient now." And, with a caressing touch of the hand, she continued on up.

Nordensterne, on his part, proceeded at once to his own room.

It had grown so prematurely dark that the accustomed lights were already lighted in the halls and elsewhere.

Much to his surprise, the detective entered his room to find himself unexpectedly confronted by Dr. Dreamthorpe, while Hannibal, though still on sentry duty, was scratching his head and looking as if he had just received a sharp scolding.

The professor at once turned upon the detective with an asperity, to put it mildly, that seemed altogether foreign to him, or which at all events he had never ventured upon in addressing his guest before.

"What, sir," he exclaimed, "is the meaning of my personal attendant being commanded to this ridiculous sentry duty in broad day? Is it not enough, I should like to know, that your excessive cautiousness should retain him, together with my coachman, in such service by night, that you—"

Nordensterne's dark face had slowly reddened, only to fade out again and then assume an iron look.

"No, sir!" he half-thundered, in interruption; "it was not enough. The young girl Greeta's danger demanded the precaution in my opinion. And so far as your *daring* to hint of timidity, or lack of self-reliance on my part is concerned, I would have you to know—"

Here he was interrupted in his turn by a scream in the laboratory, and in Salome's voice.

They stared at each other, and then rushed out of the room together, followed by the negro.

Salome was at the laboratory door, with a white face.

"Greeta!" she cried. "I cannot find her—she is gone—disappeared! Come!"

She darted back, Nordensterne and Dreamthorpe following, the servant remaining within call.

At the *portiere* entrance the two men were dead abreast, shoulder to shoulder, with but room in the corridor for one to pass at a time.

The professor glared furiously at his rival, his face the picture of jealous rage and hate.

But the latter, with Dreamthorpe's innuendo still rankling, was in a thorough humor for asserting his own priority on almost any grounds just then.

"In love, as in the struggle for existence," he growled under his breath, "the fittest survives."

And, with a backward sweep of his powerful arm, he cleared the way, and strode in first.

Dreamthorpe ground his teeth, but almost instantly was thorough master of himself, as he followed without a word.

Salome, still white and agitated, was in her own room, at the door leading into Greeta's little chamber.

The men both looked in.

The neat bed was vacant, with the outlined mark still apparent as left by the pressure of the girl's reclining form.

In an easy-chair at the side sat Madame Tourette, huddling there fast asleep, a glass and a halfemptied bottle of sherry on the floor at her side.

"The girl was dressed when she lay down, I presume?" exclaimed the detective, being the first one to speak.

"Fully so," murmured Salome in reply, clasping her hands.

"She has been carried off," were Nordensterne's next words, "and by way of the laboratory! It could not have been by the other corridor, through my apartment. I have the only key of its door, and, moreover, Hannibal was on guard there. Yes, by the laboratory, and while you two were in the drawing-room with your visitor. She has been carried off!" he repeated. "Come; no time is to be lost; though you, Miss Haworth, will not stir a step in the active search."

"Carried off fiddlesticks!" ejaculated the professor, once more temporarily beside himself at the other's authoritative tone. "The girl has simply wandered off somewhere, dazed by the opium in the composing draughts she has swallowed from time to time."

"Oh!" cried Salome, indescribably distressed, "never mind. Don't dispute, but set about the search at once!"

This was done forthwith, the alarm being given, and every one in the house, with the exception of herself and the incapacitated Celeste, set upon a systematic search of the entire building from end to end and from top to bottom.

But Greeta was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

NOTHING coming of the search in the house, it was then taken up among the surrounding snow-paths, even some hired men from the neighboring estates being enlisted in the work, but with no better result.

And still Nordensterne kept his own counsel as to his secret, and now fully confirmed suspicions that connected the girl's evanishment with the veiled woman and the house-boat rendezvous.

He was literally compelled to do so in a measure, even against his will and feelings, inasmuch as to precipitate the quest in that direction would undoubtedly give the banded miscreants the alarm, and cause them to scatter beyond the hope of their wholesale surprise and capture, which he had so much at heart.

And as yet there was not a sign of the promised squad from Headquarters.

To make matters yet more gloomy, in the search about the grounds, which he caused to be resumed directly after the hasty and ill-prepared dinner—that dinner which was destined to constitute the crowning humiliation of Alphonse Tourette's culinary career, scarcely second to that over his wife's disgraceful delinquency—had been disposed of, for appearance's sake; Johann, the coachman, met with a serious accident, slipping on one of the icy paths, and breaking a leg above the knee.

This necessitated a surgeon's attendance from a considerable distance, Dreamthorpe making no pretensions to surgical skill, and also eliminated Hannibal from further activity outside, on his assistance being in requisition for the injured man.

Half an hour later, Nordensterne was once more stepping out into the pitch-dark of the drive, still hoping against hope, when there was the flash-gleam of a dark lantern from a short distance out.

He hurried toward it, his revolver in readiness for a cheating emergency.

The next instant there was an exchange of words, his name was spoken, his hand grasped by a familiar pressure.

Suspense was at an end—the promised squad had arrived!

There were fourteen men in all—good men and true—led by Hank Deshon, his chum on the detective force.

In a few minutes the situation was explained, and everything was organized.

"Shall we make the attack at once?" demanded Deshon.

"At once!" was the response. "Even now the poor girl I have alluded to may be in the gang's power—may be already murdered. Come on!"

Every man was provided with a dark lantern, besides being armed to the teeth.

As a first precaution, one man, whom Nordensterne managed to smuggle into the building and through the north wing unperceived, was placed on guard at the tunnel-entrance door in the cellar.

Then the attacking force, with the Blizzard Detective in the lead, started river-ward through the trough-like path in the deep snow, down the slippery descent, on their arduous and perilous mission.

As all, with the exception of their leader, were totally unfamiliar with the route, while for caution's sake they were compelled to be chary of such lantern flashes as might guide them amid

the unrelieved blackness of the evening, there were numerous mishaps by the way, but that was all.

Arriving at the hillside shanty, which was found to be deserted, another trusty detective was posted there in concealed guard over the secret door.

Then the route to the river's edge was resumed.

Nordensterne had already thoroughly explained the position of the house-boat and its approaches to each of the squad individually.

Twenty minutes later, they were at the river-fronting gangway.

The temperature had greatly moderated, and was but little below the freezing point; and now the pitch-darkness began to be relieved by a break in the cloudy envelope overhead, through which presently the full moon sailed into view, flinging her mild luster over the wild and wintry scene.

Faint murmurs had already been distinguished from the aft compartment, proving that in all probability the banded miscreants were under cover, and doubtless unsuspecting of the retributive human net that was closing around them.

"It is fortunate that you did not delay any longer," whispered the Blizzard Detective to his chum when the final arrangements were complete. "This change of weather would doubtless have soon scattered the gang upon various plundering expeditions, perhaps not again to be thoroughly bunched together as now."

Two men were left on the ice to guard the gangway steps and the adjacent boat, while the remainder were stealthily piloted by their intrepid leader on board, through the intervening compartments, to the door of the large after-cabin.

Dancing, whistling and other sounds of merriment from within had before this occasioned Nordensterne a pang of disappointment, since it betokened that the veiled woman could hardly be on the bulk.

At a given signal, the door was suddenly burst open.

The squad poured in upon the surprised and astounded robbers with a hoarse shout, clubs waving, revolvers leveled.

So complete was the surprise that each of the detectives seemed to bring down his man with a whack of the locust at the first charge.

But the remaining miscreants were still two to one, and they made a hard fight for it.

For a minute or two there was a terrific and confused struggle a chaotic jumble of trampling feet, sounding blows, shouts, oaths, cries, and now and then a ringing report.

Nordensterne saved Deshon from a knife-lunge by shooting the big mulatto, who was bent on making it, through the head.

Two other robbers were remorselessly shot down early in the fray.

The detectives were finally masters of the fight, with the majority of the gang prostrate or handcuffed, though six or seven had succeeded in breaking through their line.

"The boat! the boat!" shouted the leader of these fugitives as they were making their rush for the gangway.

"Let them go," observed Nordensterne. "It is my private opinion that they will be somewhat disappointed in the boat."

He then darted into the luxuriously-fitted aftermost cabin, followed by Deshon and one or two others.

There was no trace of either the veiled woman or the missing girl.

"It is as I feared," growled Nordensterne. "But we may yet bring the woman to bay in the underground passage, or perhaps in the Sanitarium itself."

At this juncture, shots being heard outside, he hurriedly retraced his steps to the forward deck, followed by Deshon alone.

The gangway guard had been overpowered, though fortunately without being seriously injured, and the fugitive ruffians, seven in number, were already well out on the open water stretch in the yawl, the moonlight fitfully lighting up the dramatic spectacle.

"Hold!" and Nordensterne's hand was on Deshon's arm as the latter was leveling his revolver. "Hold, and just wait!"

At that instant a column of water thicker than a prize-fighter's fore-arm was seen to leap into the air from the boat's bottom at the bow.

There was a cry of dismay from the fugitives as the boat filled.

"You seem to have provided against everything, Karl!" exclaimed Deshon. "For of course that is your work."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE HAUNTED LOFT'S LAST HORROR.

The next moment all the fugitives were struggling in the icy water.

Nordensterne and Deshon, with the assistance of the two sentries, who had by this time regained their feet, succeeded in dragging five of the strugglers out upon the ice, and making them prisoners.

The two others were drowned, the strong current swiftly sweeping them away under the opposite ice.

Returning with their prisoner to the after cabin of the hulk, they found that the victors left there had by this time succeeded in organizing the results of the general success, as you might say.

Five of the robbers had been killed outright, as many more were seriously wounded, and there were, moreover, twenty-one comparatively uninjured prisoners in all.

Among the slain, as subsequently discovered, was a man who had been kept by the robbers in confinement, bound hand and foot, in a large cupboard or locker.

It was the unfortunate, if scoundrelly, Koffsky, a random bullet having penetrated the door of his prison-hole, and taken him fairly in the forehead.

It was another disappointment for the detective, for, in the event of Greeta not being produced alive, of which there seemed to be but little remaining hope, with Koffsky there would have passed away doubtless an important clew linking his past career with the veiled woman, her projects, aspirations and the full motive of her life of crime.

It now being pretty evident that the entire miscreant band, with the single exception of its mysterious leader, was summarily disposed of for the time being, the hulk was left in charge of the main body of its captors, while Nordensterne, accompanied solely by Hank Deshon, set out on their return to the hillside shanty.

Before this, however, the plunder-stuffed hold of the hulk had been thoroughly overhauled and investigated, and they carried between them one of the kegs of gunpowder, already mentioned as a significant portion of the hoarded loot.

"We shall see," observed Nordensterne, who had made further confidences of his past experiences to his companion, "if that barrier to the passage leading in under the hill will be as proof against blasting operations as it has heretofore been to my assaults with crowbar and pick."

They re-entered the shanty to find the man on guard there undisturbed, though he reported that there had issued sounds as of footsteps from behind the passage door soon after his assumption of his sentry duty, when an unfortunate movement of his, which upset a bench with a great clatter, had caused them to cease or withdraw.

"All right!" exclaimed Nordensterne, proceeding at once to plant the gunpowder against the door to the best advantage, while Deshon busied himself with improvising a slow-match attachment. "The woman leader of the gang doubtless effected her escape into the passage yonder just before our arrival, and should be somewhere within there still, or else working some last desperate deviltry in the Sanitarium itself. In either case, I fancy we shall be dead on her serpent trail in short order."

Then, everything being in readiness, the fuse was fired, and they all ran out to a safe distance along the foot of the snowy slope.

The anticipated explosion came even sooner and with more telling effect than they had anticipated.

There was a lurid blaze, an earth-quivering roar, and the hut was blown into fragments that were distributed far and wide.

Rushing, lantern in hand, through the smoking ruin, or rather the torn spot that had been its site, the secret door was found to have also disappeared, leaving a huge, ragged hole in the hill as the unobstructed entrance into the passage.

The Blizzard Detective promptly led the way into the heart of the hill.

After proceeding through the tunnel for a long distance until it seemed that they should be near its end, there came a single shot out of the obscurity beyond, which broke the lantern Deshon was carrying, and was followed by a groan behind him.

Nordensterne answered the shot at random, when Deshon called out:

"Good Lord! poor Winton is done for. Come here, Karl!"

But nothing could be done, the ambushed shot, after whizzing by Nordensterne and breaking Deshon's lantern, which he had been carrying breast-high in the crook of his arm, had found its billet in the heart of the third detective, and he was stone-dead.

But there was no time even for regrets just now.

Deshon appropriated the victim's lantern, and the advance was at once resumed.

Nordensterne's random shot had proved fully as fatal as the one out of the darkness which it had answered.

The passage-searchers had at last come to the door opening into the cellar of the north wing.

It was half-ajar, and, drooping in a sitting posture with his back against the angle-corner, head on breast, revolver in hand, was the body of an unknown ruffian—doubtless the last of the band's rank and file, the single attendant of the veiled woman's flight, and Winston's murderer—quite dead, with Nordensterne's bullet in his breast.

So suddenly had the chance-murder of the subordinate detective been avenged, and apparently by the doom-winged bolt of Fate itself!

But the tragedies were not at an end. Deshon, who was the first to push open the door, and leap over the dead man's legs into the adjoining cellar, only did so to recoil with an exclamation of dismay.

"Heavens!" he cried; "McMurtrie done for, too? or mighty near it, at all events?"

McMurtrie was the man who had been left on guard in the cellar.

Deshon was already on his knees supporting the prostrate man, who was unconscious, as Nordensterne came into the cellar with a bound.

"He is not dead," continued Deshon, already at work over the unfortunate, "but badly wounded here in the neck, as you see—perhaps by that same scoundrel, now dead, who sent poor Winston to his last account."

"Or by the she-fiend herself?" And Nordensterne's face was a picture of exasperated savagery as he spoke.

"Like enough, but I can't leave him, Karl. You know I have some off-hand knowledge of surgery, that may be of avail here. Go on without me, at least for the present."

"All right!"

Nordensterne hurried up the steps.

The ground-floor passage above was wholly deserted, but no sooner was he in the loft than he was brought up standing at the head of the stair by the mesmeric shock with which he had by this time become so appallingly familiar.

Then the blood-smell again, once more the dimming of the lantern's wholesome light, to be replaced by the unnatural luridness, and there she was, the fiend-sorceress of the loft's horrors, in stately and dim outline against the further wall!

Riveted to the spot, the detective could only stare and gnash his teeth in his helplessness.

She seemed to take something from under her floating vail, to unwrap it, and then, as the luridness dimmed, and the lantern slowly revived its light within the narrow, circumscribed arc of its own, something that was thrown fell to the floor and rolled to his feet, while, with a low laugh more terrible than he had ever yet heard issue from those viewless lips the woman was gone, though the chaining influence of her spell remained.

As in the former instance, the detective regained just enough power and volition to pick up the object and examine it in the ringed-light.

A cry of uncontrollable, mortal horror burst from him.

Another human head!

Yes, and this time no cheat, no sham, by the amplest stretch of the imagination.

It was the freshly-decapitated head of Greeta Muller herself that he held by the hair, pallid, bloodless, comely even in this horrid guise, and staring up at him with dead, wide-open eyes!

The awful thing fell from his nerveless hand, and then how much longer he remained spell-bound and in that petrifaction of natural horror he never exactly knew, though it was doubtless not more than half-an-hour.

But he was presently himself again, and then he darted out of the loft and into his own chamber, the communicating doors having been left ajar, but no longer appalled, no longer unnerved—simply and solely with a wild, thirsting desire for vengeance, instant, fell, remorseless, upon the murderous demoness of the veiled personality and black-robed form, whomsoever she might be.

Another instant, and he was at the laboratory door.

Voces were in dispute within.

Controlling his excitement by a great effort, he noiselessly opened the door, and peered within, unperceived by those that were there.

Half-reclining on the divan was Salome, her eyes closed, or partly closed, and with what appeared to be the grayness of approaching dissolution coming into her exquisite face, an empty glass still in her listless hand.

Confronting each other at the table, stood Dreamthorpe and the veiled woman, though veiled no longer—Therese herself, with the mask thrown aside at last, terrible in her dark beauty, regal in her demoniac triumph.

She clutched in her hand a stoppered vial, which her miserable husband seemed to have just been vainly beseeching at her hands; for his attitude was still one of agonizing supplication, while she regarded him with pitiless denial and scorn.

"Not so!" she cried. "What! have I at last succeeded in putting that pretty doll's wealth in your grasp, that we may enjoy it together, by this trick of mine which permeated with deadly poison the mighty draught you have just administered, only to now yield you up this only antidote which I now hold in my hand? Never believe it, Paracelsus, never dream it?"

"Mercy!" he all but screamed. "How could I know that you were behind me as my shadow while I was making the distillation? Great God! have mercy, Therese!"

"How he pleads," scornfully, "against the death which his own art holds at arm's length, as it has done for two centuries, and which he ever selfishly refused to impart even to me!"

"To you? God forbid! But it is not for my own life I plead, but for hers. Give me the antidote—the only one—stolen by you from yonder

cabinet. Give it me, Therese! Heavens! mark the change that is already upon her! In five minutes it may be too late! In mercy, Therese, in mercy!"

"Mercy and from me? Never!" with a diabolical laugh.

Dreamthorpe looked at her despairingly. Then, suddenly producing a vial, he drained off its contents.

"What is the conquest of death even for ages and ages worth?" he wailed, sinking down by the divan. "Salome," clasping her hand, "I cannot save thee, but I can die with thee, even if thou couldst not have loved me. Therese, demoness! Thou art foiled at last! By my death I conquer!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

BUT this was a result that Therese could never have counted on.

She sprung forward with a cry.

"Paracelsus, you must not die!" She exclaimed, frenziedly. "What would then become of Salome's wealth for which I have waded through crime and sold my soul? Here, quick! the antidote! There is only enough for one saving, and it must be yours."

He waved her feebly to one side, his head sinking, his eyes closing.

At this instant, having noiselessly slipped into the room, Nordensterne suddenly precipitated himself upon Therese!

He felt like rending her piecemeal, and seemed only to keep himself within bounds by a terrible effort.

In an instant, however, he had hurled her to the floor with a stupefying shock, and, with a snap, the handcuffs were on her wrists.

Then the antidote was in his hand, Salome's head was on his shoulder, and he was pouring it down her throat.

"There is only enough for one saving!" had been Therese's last words ere she was hurled senseless.

That saving, that rescue, should be Salome's! So powerful and sure was the antidote that even in a few seconds she began to revive.

But almost at the same instant Dr. Dreamthorpe fell at his full length upon the carpet and expired.

If he had, indeed, baffled death for two centuries, there was a grandeur and nobility in the sacrifice with which he had at last summoned the Destroyer to his side, dashing aside the elixir of life for the poisoned cup, rather than live on and on and on, without the answering love-light of a beloved woman's eyes, without which immortality itself were but a barren waste, a desolation and a despair.

At this juncture Hank Deshon made his appearance in the laboratory, supporting McMurtrie, whom he had succeeded in reviving; and after they had made their way up through the north wing as best they could, though wholly unfamiliar with the premises.

Hannibal and the Tourettes were at once called and Salome sent off to bed, while a neighboring physician was summoned.

Therese was borne off a prisoner, together with such of her band as had been made captive, later on.

On the following morning she was found dead in her cell, presumably from poison; and with her perished all hope of fully explaining the strange tissue of crime, mystery and jugglery of which she had been the head and front.

The headless remains of poor Greeta never came to light, nor were the circumstances of her murder ever made manifest.

Dr. Dreamthorpe's remains were buried by a distant relative, to whom it was found that he had willed his estate, embracing the Sanitarium building and grounds, together with an inconsiderable personal property.

Maida Berlioz unaccountably disappeared on that terrible night of culminating horrors. She was never heard of again.

The breaking up of the house-boat gang was one of the most important police triumphs in many years, and the Blizzard Detective's reputation was the pride of the force.

But as he married Salome Haworth—who speedily recovered her wonted health when transferred to happier surroundings, and also perhaps under a more enlightened treatment—within three months, he was naturally better satisfied with such a prize than anything that his profession could have offered him.

After a long sojourn in Europe, the couple are now living, happy in their conjugal love, and with children around them, on a handsome estate in New Jersey, where Monsieur Tourette, Hannibal and Johann are members of their domestic establishment. Madame Tourette had, unfortunately, succumbed to her weakness for the cup a short time before.

THE END.

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